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COMMON SENSE:

OR,

NATURAL IDEAS

OPPOSED TO

SUPERNATURAL.

Detexit quo doloso vaticinandi furore sacerdotes mysteria, illis sæpe ignota, audacter publicant. PETRONII SATYRICON.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

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1795.

PREFACE.

WHEN we coolly examine the opinions of men, we are ſurpriſed to find, that in thoſe, which they regard as the moſt eſſential, nothing is more uncommon than the uſe of common ſenſe; or, in other words, a degree of judgment ſufficient to diſcover the moſt ſimple truths, to reject the moſt ſtriking abſurdities, and to be ſhocked with palpable contradictions. We have an example of it in theology, a ſcience revered in all times and countries, by the greateſt number of men; an object they regard as the moſt important, the moſt uſeful, and the moſt indiſpenſable to the happineſs of ſocieties. Indeed, with little examination of the principles, upon which this pretended ſcience is founded, we are forced to acknowledge, that theſe principles, judged inconteſtable, are only hazardous ſuppoſitions, imagined by ignorance, propagated by enthuſiaſm or knavery, adopted by timid credulity, preſerved by cuſtom, which never reaſons, and revered ſolely becauſe not underſtood. *Some*, ſays Montagne, *make the world think, that they believe what they do not; others, in greater number, make themſelves think, that they believe what they do not, not knowing what belief is.*

In a word, whoever will deign to conſult common ſenſe upon religious opinions, and beſtow in this inquiry the attention that is commonly given to objects, we preſume intereſting, will eaſily perceive, that theſe opinions have no foundation; that all religion is an edifice in the air; that theology is only the ignorance of natural cauſes reduced to ſyſtem; that it is a long tiſſue of chimeras and contradictions. That it repreſents, in every country, to the differ-

ent nations of the earth, only romances void of probability, the hero of which is himſelf compoſed of qualities impoſſible to combine; that his name, exciting in all hearts reſpect and fear, is only a vague word, which men have continually in their mouths, without being able to affix to it ideas or qualities, which are not contradicted by facts, or evidently inconſiſtent with one another.

The idea of this being, of whom we have no idea, or rather, the word by which he is deſignated, would be an indifferent thing, did it not cauſe innumerable ravages in the world. Prepoſſeſſed with the opinion, that this phantom is an intereſting reality, men, inſtead of concluding wiſely from its incomprehenſibility, that they are not bound to regard it; on the contrary infer, that they cannot ſufficiently meditate upon it, that they muſt contemplate it without ceaſing, reaſon upon it without end, and never loſe ſight of it. Their invincible ignorance, in this reſpect, far from diſcouraging them, irritates their curioſity; inſtead of putting them upon guard againſt their imagination, this ignorance renders them deciſive, dogmatical, imperious, and even exaſperates them againſt all, who oppoſe doubts to the reveries, which their brains have begotten.

What perplexity ariſes, when it is required to ſolve an inſolvable problem! Reſtleſs meditations upon an object, impoſſible to underſtand, in which, however, he thinks himſelf much concerned, cannot but put man in a very ill humor, and produce in his head dangerous tranſports. Let intereſt, vanity and ambition, co-operate ever ſo little with theſe diſpoſitions, and ſociety muſt neceſſarily be diſturbed. This is the reaſon that ſo many nations have often been the theatres of the extravagances of ſenſeleſs dreamers, who, believing, or publiſhing their empty ſpeculations as eternal truths,

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have kindled the enthuſiaſm of princes and people, and armed them for opinions, which they repreſented as eſſential to the glory of the Deity, and the happineſs of empires. In all parts of our globe, intoxicated fanatics have been ſeen cutting each other's throats, lighting funeral piles, committing, without ſcruple and even as a duty, the greateſt crimes, and ſhedding torrents of blood. For what? To ſtrengthen, ſupport, or propagate the impertinent conjectures of ſome enthuſiaſts, or to give validity to the cheats of ſome impoſtors, in the name and behalf of a being, who exiſts only in their imagination, and who has made himſelf known only by the ravages, diſputes, and follies, he has cauſed upon the earth.

Fierce and uncultivated nations, perpetually at war, have in their origin, under divers names, adored ſome God, conformable to their ideas; that is to ſay, cruel, carnivorous, ſelfiſh, blood-thirſty. We find, in all religions of the earth, a *God of armies*, a *jealous God*, an *avenging God*, a *deſtroying God*, a *God*, who is pleaſed with carnage, and whom his worſhippers, as a duty, ſerve to his taſte. Lambs, bulls, children, men, heretics, infidels, kings, whole nations are ſacrificed to him. Do not the zealous ſervants of this ſo barbarous God, even think it a duty to offer up themſelves as a ſacrifice to him? We every where ſee madmen, who, after diſmal meditations upon their terrible God, imagine, that to pleaſe him, they muſt do themſelves all poſſible injury, and inflict on themſelves, for his honor, invented torments. In ſhort, the gloomy ideas of the divinity, far from conſoling men under the evils of life, have every where diſquieted and confuſed their minds, and produced follies deſtructive to their happineſs.

Infeſted with frightful phantoms, and guided by men, intereſted in perpetuating its ignorance and fears, how could

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the human mind have made any conſiderable progreſs? Man has been forced to vegetate in his primitive ſtupidity; nothing has been offered to his mind, but ſtories of inviſible powers, upon whom his happineſs was ſuppoſed to depend. Occupied ſolely by his fears, and unintelligible reveries, he has always been at the mercy of his prieſts, who have reſerved to themſeleves the right of thinking for him, and directing his actions.

Thus man has been, and ever will remain, a child without experience, a ſlave without courage, a ſtupid animal, who has feared to reaſon, and who has never known how to extricate himſelf from the labyrinth, where his anceſtors had ſtrayed. He has believed himſelf forced to groan under the yoke of his gods, whom he has known only by the fabulous accounts of his miniſters, who, after having bound him with the chords of opinion, have remained his maſters; or rather have abandoned him, defenceleſs, to the abſolute power of tyrants, no leſs terrible than the gods, whoſe repreſentatives they have been upon earth.

Cruſhed under the double yoke of ſpiritual and temporal power, it was impoſſible for the people to know and purſue their happineſs. As religion, politics, and morality became ſanctuaries, into which the ungodly were not permitted to enter, men had no other morality, than what their legiſlators and prieſts brought down from the unknown regions of the Empyrean. The human mind, confuſed with its theological opinions, forgot itſelf, doubted its own powers, miſtruſted experience, feared truth, diſdained its reaſon, and abandoned her direction, blindly to follow authority. Man was a mere machine in the hands of his tyrants and prieſts, who alone had the right of directing his actions; always led like a ſlave, he ever had his vices and character. Theſe are the true cauſes of the corruption of morals, to which religion never

oppoſes

oppoſes only ideal barriers, and that without effect. Ignorance and ſervitude are calculated to make men wicked and unhappy. Knowledge, reaſon, and liberty can alone reform them, and make them happier; but every thing conſpires to blind them, and confirm their errors. Prieſts cheat them, tyrants corrupt, the better to enſlave them. Tyranny ever was, and ever will be, the true cauſe of the corruption of morals, and the habitual calamities of men; who, almoſt always faſcinated with religious notions, and metaphyſical fictions, inſtead of turning their eyes to the natural and obvious cauſes of their miſery, attribute their vices to the imperfection of their nature, and their unhappineſs to the anger of the gods. They offer up to heaven vows, ſacrifices, and preſents, to obtain the end of their ſufferings, which, in reality, are chargeable only to the negligence, ignorance, and perverſity of their guides, the folly of their inſtitutions, their ſilly cuſtoms, falſe opinions, irrational laws, and above all, to the want of knowledge. Let men's minds be filled with true ideas; let their reaſon be cultivated; let juſtice govern them; and there will be no need of oppoſing to the paſſions, ſuch a feeble barrier, as a fear of gods. Men will be good, when they are well inſtructed, well governed, and when they are puniſhed or deſpiſed for the evil, and juſtly rewarded for the good, they do to their fellow-creatures.

In vain ſhould we attempt to cure men of their vices, unleſs we begin by curing them of their prejudices. It is only by ſhewing them the truth, that they will know their deareſt intereſts, and the motives that ought to incline them to do good. Inſtructors have long enough fixed men's eyes upon heaven, let them now turn them upon earth. Fatigued with an inconceivable theology, ridiculous fables, impenetrable myſteries, puerile ceremonies, let the human

mind

mind apply itſelf to the ſtudy of nature, to intelligible objects, ſenſible truths, and uſeful knowledge. Let the vain chimeras of men be removed, and reaſonable opinions will ſoon come of themſelves, into thoſe heads, which were thought to be forever deſtined to error.

Does it not ſuffice to annihilate or ſhake religious prejudices, to ſhew, that what is inconceivable to man, cannot be made for him? Does it then require any thing, but plain, common ſenſe, to perceive, that a being incompatible with the moſt evident notions; that a cauſe continually oppoſed to the effects, which we attribute to it; that a being, of whom we can ſay nothing, without falling into contradiction; that a being, who, far from explaining the enigmas of the univerſe, only makes them more inexplicable; that a being, whom for ſo many ages men have ſo vainly addreſſed to obtain their happineſs, and the end of their ſufferings; does it require, I ſay, any thing but plain, common ſenſe, to perceive, that the idea of ſuch a being is an idea without model, and that it is evidently only a being of imagination? Is any thing neceſſary but common ſenſe to perceive, at leaſt, that it is madneſs and folly to hate and torment one another for unintelligible opinions upon a being of this kind? In ſhort, does not every thing prove, that morality and virtue are totally incompatible with the notions of a God, whom his miniſters and interpreters have deſcribed in every country, as the moſt capricious, unjuſt, and cruel of tyrants, whoſe pretended will, however, muſt ſerve as law and rule to the inhabitants of the earth?

To learn the true principles of morality, men have no need of theology, of revelation, or gods: They have need only of reaſon. They have only to enter into themſelves, to reflect upon their own nature, conſult their ſenſible intereſts,

eſts, conſider the object of ſociety, and of the individuals, who compoſe it; and they will eaſily perceive, that virtue is the intereſt, and vice the unhappineſs of beings of their kind. Let us perſuade men to be juſt, beneficent, moderate, ſociable; not becauſe the gods demand it, but becauſe they muſt pleaſe men. Let us adviſe them to obſtain from vice and crimes; not becauſe they will be puniſhed in the other world, but becauſe they will ſuffer for it in this.—— *There are*, ſays a great man,* *means to prevent crimes—theſe are puniſhments; there are thoſe to reform manners—theſe are good examples.*

Truth is ſimple; error is complex, uncertain in its progreſs, and full of windings. The voice of nature is intelligible; that of falſehood is ambiguous, enigmatical, myſterious; the way of truth is ſtraight; that of impoſture is crooked and dark. Truth, forever neceſſary to man, muſt neceſſarily be felt by all upright minds; the leſſons of reaſon are formed to be followed by all honeſt men. Men are unhappy only becauſe they are ignorant; they are ignorant only becauſe every thing conſpires to prevent their being enlightened; they are ſo wicked only becauſe their reaſon is not yet ſufficiently unfolded.

By what fatality then, have the firſt founders of all ſects given to their gods the moſt ferocious characters, at which nature recoils? Can we imagine a conduct more abominable, than that aſcribed by Moſes to his God, towards the Egyptians, where that aſſaſſin proceeds boldly to declare, in the name, and by the order of *his God*, that Egypt ſhall be afflicted with the greateſt calamities, that can happen to man. Of all the different ideas, which they wiſh to give us of a ſupreme being, of a God, creator and preſerver of men,

there

* Monteſquieu.

there are none more horrible, than thoſe of theſe impoſtors, who believed themſelves inſpired by a divine ſpirit.

Why, O theologians! do you preſume to rummage in the impenetrable myſteries of a firſt being, whom you call inconceivable to the human mind. You are the firſt blaſphemers, in attributing to a being, perfect according to you, ſo many horrors, committed towards creatures, whom he has made out of nothing. Confeſs, with us, your ignorance of a creating God; and forbear, in your turn, to meddle with myſteries, which man ſeems unworthy of knowing.

COMMON

COMMON SENSE.

APOLOGUE.

§ 1. THERE is a vaſt empire, governed by a monarch, whoſe ſtrange conduct is very proper to confound the minds of his ſubjects. He wiſhes to be known, loved, reſpected, obeyed; but never ſhews himſelf to his ſubjects, and every thing conſpires to render uncertain the ideas, formed of his character.

The people, ſubjected to his power, have, of the character and laws of their inviſible ſovereign, ſuch ideas only, as his miniſters give them. They, however, confeſs, that they have no idea of their maſter; that his ways are impenetrable; his views and nature totally incomprehenſible. Theſe miniſters, likewiſe, diſagree upon the commands which they pretend have been iſſued by the ſovereign, whoſe inſtruments they call themſelves. They announce them differently to each province of the empire. They defame one another, and mutually treat each other as impoſtors and falſe teachers. The decrees and ordinances, they take upon themſelves to promulgate, are obſcure; they are enigmas, little calculated to be underſtood,

ſtood, or even divined, by the ſubjects, for whoſe inſtruction they were intended. The laws of the concealed monarch require interpreters; but the interpreters are always diſputing upon the true manner of underſtanding them. Beſides, they are not conſiſtent with themſelves;—all they relate of their concealed prince is only a thread of contradiction. They utter concerning him not a ſingle word, that does not immediately confute itſelf. They call him ſupremely good; yet there is no one, who does not complain of his decrees. They ſuppoſe him infinitely wiſe; and under his adminiſtration, every thing appears to contradict reaſon and good ſenſe. They extol his juſtice; and the beſt of his ſubjects are generally the leaſt favored. They aſſert, he ſees every thing; yet his preſence avails nothing. He is, ſay they, the friend of order; yet throughout his dominions, all is in confuſion and diſorder. He makes all for himſelf; and the events ſeldom anſwer his deſigns. He foreſees every thing; but cannot prevent any thing. He impatiently ſuffers offence, yet gives every one the power of offending him. Men admire the wiſdom and perfection of his works; yet his works, full of imperfection, are of ſhort duration. He is continually doing and undoing; repairing what he has made; but is never pleaſed with his work. In all his undertakings, he propoſes only his own glory; yet is never glorified. His only end is the happineſs of his ſubjects; and his ſubjects, for the moſt part, want neceſſaries. Thoſe, whom he ſeems to favor, are generally leaſt ſatisfied with their fate; almoſt all appear in perpetual revolt againſt a maſter, whoſe greatneſs they never ceaſe to admire, whoſe wiſdom to

extol,

extol, whoſe goodneſs to adore, whoſe juſtice to fear, and whoſe laws to reverence, though never obeyed!

This EMPIRE is the WORLD; this MONARCH GOD; his MINISTERS are the PRIESTS; his SUBJECTS MANKIND.

2. There is a ſcience, that has for its object only things incomprehenſible. Contrary to all other ſciences, it treats only of what cannot fall under our ſenſes. HOBBES calls it the *kingdom of darkneſs*. It is a country, where every thing is governed by laws, contrary to thoſe which mankind are permitted to know in the world they inhabit. In this marvellous region, light is only darkneſs; evidence is doubtful or falſe; impoſſibilities are credible; reaſon is a deceitful guide; and good ſenſe becomes madneſs. This *ſcience* is called *theology*, and this theology is a continual inſult to the reaſon of man.

3. By the magical power of "*ifs*," "*buts*," "*perhapſes*," "*what do we know*," &c. heaped together, a ſhapeleſs and unconnected ſyſtem is formed, perplexing mankind, by obliterating from their minds, ideas the moſt clear, and rendering uncertain truths the moſt evident. By reaſon of this ſyſtematic jumble, nature is become an enigma, inexplicable to man; the viſible world has diſappeared, to give place to regions inviſible; reaſon is compelled to yield to imagination, who leads to the country of her ſelf-invented chimeras.

4. The principles of every religion are founded upon the idea of a GOD. Now, it is impoſſible to have true ideas of a being, who acts upon none of our ſenſes. All our ideas are repreſentations of ſenſible objects. What then can repreſent to us the idea of God, which is evidently an idea

without

without an object ? Is not such an idea as impossible, as an effect without a cause ? An idea without an archetype ! can it be any thing, but a chimera ? There are, however, divines, who assure us, that the idea of God is innate ; or that we have this idea in our mother's womb. Every principle is the result of reason ; all reason is the effect of experience ; experience is acquired only by the exercise of our senses :— therefore, religious principles are not founded upon reason, and are not innate.

5. Every system of religion can be founded only upon the nature of God and man ; and upon the relations, which subsist between them. But to judge of the reality of those relations, we must have some idea of the divine nature. Now, the world exclaims, the divine nature is incomprehensible to man ; yet ceases not to assign attributes to this incomprehensible God, and to assure us, that it is our indispensable duty, to find out that God, whom it is impossible to comprehend.

The most important concern of man is what he can least comprehend. If God is incomprehensible to man, it would seem reasonable never to think of him ; but religion maintains, man cannot with impunity cease a moment to think (or rather dream) of his God.

6. We are told, that divine qualities are not of a nature to be comprehended by finite minds. The natural consequence must be, that divine qualities are not made to occupy finite minds. But religion tells us, that the poor, finite mind of man ought never to lose sight of an inconceivable being, whose qualities he can never comprehend. Thus we see, religion is the art of turning

the attention of mankind upon ſubjects they can never comprehend.

7. Religion unites man with God, or forms a communication between them; yet do you not ſay, God is infinite? If God be infinite, no finite being can have communication or relation with him. Where there is no relation, there can be no union, communication, or duties. If there be no duties between man and his God, there is no religion for man. Thus, in ſaying God is infinite, you annihilate religion for man, who is a finite being. The idea of infinity is to us an idea without model, without archetype, without object.

8. If God be an infinite being, there connot be, either in the preſent or future world, any relative proportion, between man and his God. Thus, the idea of God can never enter the human mind. In ſuppoſition of a life, in which man would be much more enlightened, than in this, the idea of the infinity of God would ever remain the ſame diſtance from his finite mind. Thus the idea of God will be no more clear in the future, than in the preſent life. Thus, intelligences, ſuperior to man, can have no more complete ideas of God, than man, who has not the leaſt conception of him, in his preſent life.

9. How has it been poſſible to perſuade reaſonable beings, that the thing, the moſt impoſſible to comprehend, was the moſt eſſential to them? It is becauſe they have been greatly terrified; becauſe, when they fear, they ceaſe to reaſon; becauſe, they have been taught to miſtruſt their own underſtanding; becauſe, when the brain is troubled, they believe every thing, and examine nothing.

10. Ignorance

10. Ignorance and fear are the two hinges of all religion. The uncertainty, in which man finds himſelf, in relation to his God, is preciſely the motive, that attaches him to his religion. Man is fearful in the dark—in moral, as well as phyſical darkneſs. His fear becomes habitual, and habit makes it natural; he would think, that he wanted ſomething, if he had nothing to fear.

11. He, who from infancy has habituated himſelf to tremble, when he hears pronounced certain words, requires thoſe words and needs to tremble. He is therefore more diſpoſed to liſten to one, who entertains him in his fears, than to one, who diſſuades him from them. The ſuperſtitious man wiſhes to fear; his imagination demands it;—one might ſay, that he fears nothing ſo much, as to have nothing to fear.

Men are imaginary invalids, whoſe weakneſs empirics are intereſted to encourage, in order to have ſale for their drugs. They liſten rather to the phyſician, who preſcribes a variety of remedies, than to him, who recommends good regimen, and leaves nature to herſelf.

12. If religion were more clear, it would have leſs charms for the ignorant, who are pleaſed only with obſcurity, myſteries, fables, prodigies, and things incredible. Romances, bugbears, and the tales of ghoſts and wizards, are more pleaſing to vulgar minds, than true hiſtories.

13. In point of religion, men are only great children. The more a religion is abſurd and filled with wonders, the greater aſcendency it acquires over them. The devout man thinks himſelf obliged to place no bounds to his credulity; the more things are inconceivable, they appear to him divine; the more they are incredible, the

greater

greater merit, he imagines, there is in believing them.

14. The origin of religious opinions is generally dated from the time, when ſavage nations were yet in infancy. It was to groſs, ignorant, and ſtupid people, that the founders of religion have in all ages addreſſed themſelves, when they wiſhed to give them their Gods, their mode of worſhip, their mythology, their marvellous and frightful fables. Theſe chimeras, adopted without examination by parents, are tranſmitted, with more or leſs innovation, to their children, who ſeldom reaſon any more, than their parents.

15. The object of the firſt legiſlators was to govern the people; and the eaſieſt method to effect it was to terrify their minds, and to prevent the exerciſe of reaſon. They led them through winding bye-paths, leſt they might perceive the deſigns of their guides;—they forced them to fix their eyes in the air, for fear they ſhould look at their feet;—they amuſed them on the way with idle ſtories;—in a word, they treated them as nurſes do children, who ſing lullabies, and ſcold, to put them to ſleep, or make them be quiet.

16. The exiſtence of a God is the baſis of all religion. Few appear to doubt his exiſtence; yet this fundamental article utterly embarraſſes every mind, that reaſons. The firſt queſtion of every catechiſm has been, and ever will be the moſt difficult to reſolve.* 17. Can

* In the year 1701, the holy fathers of Vendome maintained in a theſis, this propoſition: that, according to St. Thomas, the exiſtence of God is not, and cannot be a ſubject of faith.

Dei exiſtentia nec ad fidem attinet, nec attinere poteſt juxta Sanctum Thomam. Vide BASNAGE, Hiſtory of the works of learned men, vol. XVII, page 277.

17. Can we imagine ouſelvres ſincerely convinced of the exiſtence of a being, whoſe nature we know not; who is inacceſſible to all our ſenſes; whoſe attributes, we are aſſured every moment, are incomprehenſible to us? To perſuade me that a being exiſts or can exiſt, I muſt be firſt told, what that being is. To induce me to believe the exiſtence or the poſſibility of ſuch a being, it is neceſſary to tell me things concerning him that are not contradictory and do not deſtroy one another. In ſhort, fully to convince me of the exiſtence of that being, it is neceſſary to tell me things, that I can underſtand, and to prove to me, that it is impoſſible, that ſuch a being ſhould not exiſt.

18. A thing is impoſſible, when it includes two ideas, that mutually deſtroy one another, and which can neither be conceived nor united in thought. Conviction can be founded only upon the conſtant teſtimony of our ſenſes, which alone give birth to our ideas, and enable us to judge of their agreement or diſagreement. That, which exiſts neceſſarily, is that, whoſe non-exiſtence implies a contradiction. Theſe principles, univerſally acknowledged, become erroneous, when applied to the exiſtence of a God. Whatever has been hitherto ſaid upon the ſubject, is either unintelligible, or perfect contradiction, and muſt therefore appear abſurd to every rational man.

19. All human knowledge is more or leſs clear and perfect. By what ſtrange fatality have we never been able to elucidate the ſcience of God? The moſt civilized nations, and among them the moſt profound thinkers, are in this reſpect no more enlightened, than the moſt ſavage tribes and

ignorant

ignorant peaſants; and, examining the ſubject cloſely, we ſhall find, that, by the idle ſpeculations and ſubtle refinements of men, the divine ſcience has been only more and more obſcured. Every religion has hitherto been founded only upon what is called, in logic, *begging the queſtion;* it takes things for granted, and then proves, by ſuppoſitions, inſtead of principles.

20. Metaphyſics teach us, that God is a *pure ſpirit.* But, herein is modern theology ſuperior tothat of the ſavages? The ſavages acknowledge a *great ſpirit*, for the maſter of the world. The ſavages, like all ignorant people, attribute to *ſpirits* all the effects, of which their experience cannot diſcover the true cauſes. Aſk a ſavage, what moves your watch. He will anſwer you, *it is a ſpirit.* Aſk our divines, what moves the univerſe? They anſwer, *it is a ſpirit.*

21. The ſavage, when he ſpeaks of a ſpirit, affixes, at leaſt, ſome idea to the word; he means thereby an agent, like the air, the breeze, the zephyr, that inviſibly produces diſcernible effects. By ſubtilizing every thing, the modern theologian becomes as unintelligible to himſelf as to others. Aſk him, what he underſtands by a ſpirit? He will anſwer you, that it is an unknown ſubſtance, perfectly ſimple, that has no extenſion, that has nothing common with matter. Indeed, is there any one, who can form the leaſt idea of ſuch a ſubſtance? What then is a ſpirit, to ſpeak in the language of modern theology, but the abſence of an idea? The idea of *ſpirituality* is yet an idea without model.

22. Is it not more natural and intelligible to draw univerſal exiſtence from the boſom of matter, whoſe effects we experience every moment, which

we ſee act, move, communicate motion, and inceſſantly generate, than to attribute the formation of things to an unknown power, to a ſpiritual being, who cannot derive from his nature, what he has not himſelf, and who, by his ſpiritual eſſence, can create neither matter nor motion. Nothing is more evident, than that the idea, they endeavor to give us, of the action of mind upon matter, repreſents no object, or is an idea without model.

23. The material *Jupiter* of the ancients could move, compoſe, deſtroy, and create beings, ſimilar to himſelf; but the God of modern theology is a ſterile being. He can neither occupy any place in ſpace, nor move matter, nor form a viſible world, nor create men or Gods. The metaphyſical God is a worker without hands, fit only to produce confuſion, reveries, follies, and diſputes.

24. Since a God was indiſpenſably requiſite to men, why did they not worſhip the ſun, that viſible God, adored by ſo many nations? What being had greater claim to the homage of men, than the day-ſtar, who enlightens, warms, and vivifies all beings; whoſe preſence enlivens and regenerates nature, whoſe abſence ſeems to caſt her into gloom and languor. If any being announced to mankind, power, activity, beneficence, and duration, it was certainly the Sun, whom they ought to have regarded as the parent of nature, as the ſoul of the world, as the divinity. At leaſt, they could not, without folly, diſpute his exiſtence, or refuſe to acknowledge his influence and his bleſſings.

25. The theologian exclaims to us, that God wants neither hands nor arms to act; that *he acts by his will.* But pray, who or what is that God,

who

who has a will, and what can be the ſubject of his divine will ?

Are the ſtories of witches, ſylphs, ghoſts, wizards, were-wolves, &c. more abſurd and difficult to believe than the magical or impoſſible action of mind upon matter ? When we admit ſuch a God, fables, reveries, &c. may claim belief. Theologians treat men, as children, whoſe ſimplicity makes them believe all the ſtories they hear.

26. To ſhake the exiſtence of God, we need only to aſk a theologian to ſpeak of him. The leaſt reflection will convince us, that his obſervations are totally incompatible with the eſſence he aſcribes to his God. What then is God ? It is an abſtract word, denoting the hidden power of nature ; or it is a mathematical point, that has neither length, breadth nor thickneſs. A philoſopher, ſpeaking of theologians, has ingeniouſly obſerved, *that they have diſcovered the ſolution of the famous problem of Archimedes ; a point in the heavens, whence they move the world.**

27. Religion proſtrates men before a being, who, without extenſion, is infinite, and fills all with his immenſity ; a being, all-powerful, who never executes his will ; a being, ſovereignly good, who creates only diſquietudes ; a being, the friend of order, and in whoſe government all is in confuſion and diſorder. What then, can we imagine, can be the God of theology ?

28. To avoid all embarraſſment, we are told, " that it is not neceſſary to know what God is ; that we muſt adore without knowing him ; that we are not permitted to extend our raſh views to his attributes." But, before we know that we muſt adore

* D. Hume.

adore a God, muſt we not know certainly, that he exiſt? But, how can we aſſure ourſelves, that he exiſt, if we never examine whether the various qualities, attributed to him, do really exiſt and agree in him? Indeed, to adore God, is to adore only the fictions of one's own imagination, or rather, it is to adore nothing.

29. In view, without doubt, of confounding things the more, theologians have not been pleaſed to declare, what their God is; they never tell us only what he is not. By means of negations and abſtractions, they think to have compoſed a real and perfect being, while, in truth, it is only ideal. Mind is that, which is not body. An infinite being is a being, who is not finite. A perfect being is a being, who is not imperfect. Indeed, is there any one, who can form real ideas of ſuch a maſs of privations, or abſence of ideas? That, which excludes all idea, can it be any thing but nothing?

To pretend, that the divine attributes are beyond the reach of human conception, is to grant, that God is not made for man. To aſſure us, that, in God, all is infinite, is to own that there can be nothing common to him and his creatures. If there be nothing common to God and his creatures, God is annihilated for man, or, at leaſt, rendered uſeleſs to him. "God, they will ſay, has made man intelligent, but he has not made him omniſcient;" hence it is inferred, that he has not been able to give him faculties ſufficiently enlarged to know his divine eſſence. In this caſe, it is evident, that God has not been able nor willing to be known by his creatures. By what right then would God be angry with beings, who were naturally incapable of knowing

the divine eſſence? God would be evidently the moſt unjuſt and capricious of tyrants, if he ſhould puniſh an atheiſt, for not having known, what, by his nature, it was impoſſible he ſhould know.

30. To the generality of men, nothing renders an argument more convincing than fear. It is therefore, that theologians aſſure us, *we muſt take the ſafeſt part*; that nothing is ſo criminal as incredulity; that God will puniſh without pity every one, who has the temerity to doubt his exiſtence; that his ſeverity is juſt, ſince madneſs or perverſity only can make us deny the exiſtence of an enraged monarch, who without mercy avenges himſelf on atheiſts. If we coolly examine theſe threatenings, we ſhall find, they always ſuppoſe the thing in queſtion. They muſt firſt prove the exiſtence of a God, before they aſſure us, it is ſafeſt to believe, and horrible to doubt or deny his exiſtence. They muſt then prove, that it is poſſible and conſiſtent, that a juſt God cruelly puniſh men for having been in a ſtate of madneſs, that prevented their believing the exiſtence of a being, whom their perverted reaſon could not conceive. In a word, they muſt prove, that an infinitely juſt God can infinitely puniſh the invincible and natural ignorance of man with reſpect to the divine nature. Do not theologians reaſon very ſtrangely? They invent phantoms, they compoſe them of contradictions; they then aſſure us, it is ſafeſt not to doubt the exiſtence of theſe phantoms, they themſelves have invented. According to this mode of reaſoning, there is no abſurdity, which it would not be more ſafe to believe, than not to believe.

All children are atheiſts; they have no idea of God. Are they then criminal on account of

their

their ignorance? At what age muſt they begin to believe in God? It is, you ſay, at the age of reaſon. But at what time ſhould this age commence? Beſides, if the profoundeſt theologians loſe themſelves in the divine nature, which they do not preſume to comprehend, what ideas muſt the people of the world, women, artiſans, in a word, thoſe who compoſe the maſs of mankind, have of him?

31. Men believe in God only upon the word of thoſe, who have no more idea of him, than themſelves. Our nurſes are our firſt theologians. They talk to children of God as if he were a ſcarecrow; they teach them mechanically to fold up their hands together. Have nurſes then more true ideas of God, than the children, whom they teach to pray to him?

32. Religion, like family-eſtate, paſſes, with its incumbrances, from parents to children. Few men in the world would have a God, had not pains been taken in infancy to give them one. Each would receive from his parents and teachers the God, whom they received from theirs; but each, agreeably to his diſpoſition, would arrange, modify, and paint him in his own manner.

33. The brain of man, eſpecially in infancy, is like ſoft wax, fit to receive every impreſſion, that is made upon it. Education furniſhes him with almoſt all his ideas at a time, when he is incapable of judging for himſelf. We believe we have received from nature, or have brought with us in our birth, the true or falſe ideas, which, in a tender age, had been inſtilled into our minds; and this perſuaſion is one of the greateſt ſources of our errors.

34. Prejudice contributes to cement in us the opinions of thoſe, who have been charged with our inſtruction. We believe them much more experienced than ourſelves; we ſuppoſe they are fully convinced of the things, which they teach us; we have the greateſt confidence in them; by the care, they have taken of us in infancy, we judge them incapable of wiſhing to deceive us. Theſe are the motives, that make us adopt a thouſand errors, without other foundation than the hazardous authority of thoſe, by whom we have been brought up. The prohibition likewiſe of reaſoning upon what they teach us, by no means leſſens our confidence; but often contributes to increaſe our reſpect for their opinions.

35. The divines of mankind act very wiſely in teaching men their religious principles, before they are capable of diſtinguiſhing truth from falſehood, or their left hand from their right. It would be as difficult to inſtill into the mind of a man, forty years old, the extravagant notions, that are given us of the divinity, as to eradicate them from the mind of him, who had imbibed them from infancy.

36. It is obſerved, that the wonders of nature are ſufficient to lead us to the exiſtence of a God, and fully to convince us of this important truth. But how many are there in the world, who have the time, capacity, or diſpoſition, neceſſary to contemplate nature and meditate her progreſs? Men, for the moſt part, pay no regard to it. The peaſant is not ſtruck with the beauty of the ſun, which he ſees every day. The ſailor is not ſurpriſed at the regular motion of the ocean; he will never draw from it theological concluſions. The phenomena of nature prove the exiſtence of

a God

a God only to ſome prejudiced men, who have been early taught to behold the finger of God in every thing, whoſe mechaniſm could embarraſs them. In the wonders of nature, the unprejudiced philoſopher ſees nothing, but the power of nature, the permanent and various laws, the neceſſary effects of different combinations of matter infinitely diverſified.

37. Is there any thing more ſurpriſing than the logic of theſe divines, who, inſtead of confeſſing their ignorance of natural cauſes, ſeek beyond nature, in imaginary regions, a cauſe, much more unknown, than that nature, of which they can form at leaſt ſome idea? To ſay, that God is the author of the phenomena of nature, is it not to attribute them to an occult cauſe? What is God? What is a ſpirit? They are cauſes, of which we have no idea. O wiſe Divines! Study nature and her laws; and ſince you can there diſcover the action of natural cauſes, go not to thoſe, that are ſupernatural, which, far from enlightening will only darken your ideas, and make it utterly impoſſible, that you ſhould underſtand yourſelves.

38. Nature, you ſay, is totally inexplicable without a God. That is to ſay, to explain what you underſtand very little, you have need of a cauſe, which you underſtand not at all. You think to elucidate what is obſcure, by doubling the obſcurity; to ſolve difficulties, by multiplying them. O enthuſiaſtic philoſophers! To prove the exiſtence of a God, write complete treatiſes of botany; enter into a minute detail of the parts of the human body; launch forth into the ſky, to contemplate the revolution of the ſtars; then return to the earth to admire the courſe of waters; behold with tranſport the caterpillars, the

insects, and the organized atoms, in which you think you discern the greatness of your God. All these things will not prove the existence of that God; they will prove only, that you have not just ideas of the immense variety of matter, and of the effects, producible by its infinitely diversified combinations, that constitute the universe. They will prove only your ignorance of nature; that you have no idea of her powers, when you judge her incapable of producing a multitude of forms and beings, of which your eyes, even with the assistance of microscopes, never discern but the smallest part. In a word, they will prove, that, for want of knowing sensible agents, or those possible to know, you find it shorter to have recourse to a word, expressing an inconceivable agent.

39. We are gravely and repeatedly told, that, *there is no effect without a cause*; that, *the world did not make itself*. But the universe is a cause, it is not an effect; it is not a work; it has not been made, because it is impossible that it should have been made. The world has always been; its existence is necessary; it is its own cause. Nature, whose essence is visibly to act and produce, requires not, to discharge her functions, an invisible mover, much more unknown than herself. Matter moves by its own energy, by a necessary consequence of its heterogeneity. The diversity of motion, or modes of motion, constitutes alone the diversity of matter. We distinguish beings from one another, only by the different impressions or motions, which they communicate to our organs.

40. You see, that all is action in nature, and yet pretend that nature, by itself, is dead and without power. You imagine, that this all, es-

sentially

ſentially acting, needs a mover! What then is this mover? It is a ſpirit; a being abſolutely incomprehenſible and contradictory. Acknowledge then, that nature acts of itſelf, and ceaſe to reaſon of your ſpiritual mover, who has nothing, that is requiſite to put it in action. Return from your uſeleſs excurſions; enter again into a real world; keep to *ſecond cauſes*, and leave to divines their *firſt cauſe*, of which nature has no need, to produce all the effects you obſerve in the world.

41. It can be only by the diverſity of impreſſions and effects, which bodies make upon us, that we feel them; that we have perceptions and ideas of them; that we diſtinguiſh one from another; that we aſſign them properties. Now, to ſee or feel an object, the object muſt act upon our organs; this object cannot act upon us, without exciting ſome motion in us; it cannot excite motion in us, if it be not in motion itſelf. At the inſtant I ſee an object, my eyes are ſtruck by it; I can have no conception of light and viſion, without motion, communicated to my eye, from the luminous, extended, colored body. At the inſtant I ſmell a body, my ſmell is irritated, or put in motion, by the parts, that exhale from the odoriferous body. At the moment I hear a ſound, the tympanum of my ear is ſtruck by the air, put in motion by a ſonorous body, which would not act, if it were not in motion itſelf. Whence it evidently follows, that, without motion, I can neither feel, ſee, diſtinguiſh, compare, judge, nor occupy my thoughts upon any ſubject whatever.

We are taught in the ſchools, that *the eſſence of a thing is that, from which all its properties flow.*

*flow.** Now, it is evident, that all the properties of bodies, of which we have ideas, are owing to motion, which alone informs us of their exiſtence, and gives us the firſt conceptions of them. I cannot be informed of my own exiſtence, but by the motions I experience in myſelf. I am therefore forced to conclude, that motion is as eſſential to matter, as extenſion, and that matter cannot be conceived without it.

Should any deny, that motion is eſſential and neceſſary to matter; they cannot, at leaſt, help acknowledging, that bodies, which ſeem dead and inert, produce motion of themſelves, when placed in a fit ſituation to act upon one another. For inſtance; phoſphorus, when expoſed to the air, immediately takes fire. Meal and water, when mixed, ferment. Thus dead matter begets motion of itſelf. Matter has then the power of ſelf-motion; and nature, to act, has no need of a mover, whoſe pretended eſſence would hinder him from acting.

42. Whence comes man? What is his origin? Is he then the effect of a fortuitous concourſe of atoms? Did the firſt man ſpring, ready formed, from the duſt of the earth? I know not. Man appears to me, like all other beings, a production of nature. I ſhould be equally embarraſſed to tell, whence came the firſt ſtones, the firſt trees, the firſt lions, the firſt elephants, the firſt ants, the firſt acorns, &c. as to explain the origin of man. We are inceſſantly told to acknowledge and revere the hand of a God, of an infinitely intelligent and powerful maker, in ſo wonderful a work as the human machine. I readily con-

ſeſs,

* Eſſentia eſt quid primum in re, fons et radix omnium rei proprietatum.

feſs, that the human machine appears to me ſurpriſing. But as man exiſts in nature, I am not authorized to ſay, that his formation is above the power of nature. But I can much leſs conceive of this formation, when to explain it, I am told, that a pure ſpirit, who has neither eyes, feet, hands, head, lungs, mouth nor breath, made man by taking a little clay, and breathing upon it.

We laugh at the ſavage inhabitants of Paraguay, for calling themſelves the deſcendants of the moon. The divines of Europe call themſelves the deſcendants of a pure ſpirit. Is this pretenſion much more rational? Man is intelligent; thence it is inferred, that he can be the work only of an intelligent being, and not of nature, which is void of intelligence. Although nothing is more rare, than to ſee man make uſe of this intelligence, of which he ſeems ſo proud, I will grant that he is intelligent, that his wants develop this faculty, that ſociety eſpecially contributes to cultivate it. But I ſee nothing in the human machine, and in the intelligence with which it is endued, that announces very preciſely the infinite intelligence of the maker. I ſee, that this admirable machine is liable to be deranged; I ſee, that his wonderful intelligence is then diſordered, and ſometimes totally diſappears; I infer, that human intelligence depends upon a certain diſpoſition of the material organs of the body, and that we cannot infer the intelligence of God, any more from the intelligence of man, than from his materiality. All that we can infer from it, is, that God is material. The intelligence of man no more proves the intelligence of God, than the malice of man proves the malice of that God, who is the pretended maker of man.

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In ſpite of all the ridiculous ſhifts of divines, God will always be a cauſe contradicted by its effects, or of which it is impoſſible to judge by its works. We ſhall always ſee evil, imperfection and folly reſult from a cauſe, that is ſaid to be full of goodneſs, perfection and wiſdom.

43. "What!" you will ſay, "is intelligent man, is the univerſe, and all it contains, the effect of *chance?*" No; I repeat it, *the univerſe is not an effect;* it is the cauſe of all effects; every being, it contains, is the neceſſary effect of this cauſe, which ſometimes ſhews us its manner of acting, but generally conceals its operations.—Men uſe the word *chance* to hide their ignorance of true cauſes; which, though not underſtood, act not leſs according to certain laws. There is no effect without a cauſe. Nature is a word, uſed to denote the immenſe aſſemblage of beings, various matter, infinite combinations, and diverſified motions, that we behold. All bodies, organized or unorganized, are neceſſary effects of certain cauſes. Nothing in nature can happen by chance. Every thing is ſubject to fixed laws. Theſe laws are only the neceſſary connexion of certain effects with their cauſes. One atom of matter cannot meet another *by chance;* this meeting is the effect of permanent laws, which cauſe every being neceſſarily to act as it does, and hinder it from acting otherwiſe, in given circumſtances. To talk of the *fortuitous concourſe of atoms*, is to attribute ſome effects to chance; it is to ſay nothing, except that we are ignorant of the laws, by which bodies act, meet, combine or ſeparate.

Thoſe, who are unacquainted with nature, the properties of beings, and the effects, which muſt

neceſſarily

neceſſarily reſult from the concurrence of certain cauſes, think, that every thing takes place by chance. It is not chance, that has placed the ſun in the centre of our planetary ſyſtem ; it is by its own eſſence, that the ſubſtance, of which it is compoſed, muſt occupy that place, and thence be diffuſed to vivify the beings, inhabiting the planets.

44. The worſhippers of a God find, above all, in the order of the univerſe, an invincible proof of the exiſtence of an intelligent and wiſe being, who governs it. But this order is nothing but a ſeries of movements neceſſarily produced by cauſes or circumſtances, which are ſometimes favorable, and ſometimes hurtful to us ; we approve of ſome, and complain of others.

Nature uniformly follows the ſame round ; that is, the ſame cauſes produce the ſame effects, as long as their action is not diſturbed by other cauſes, which force them to produce different effects. When the operation of cauſes; whoſe effects we experience, is interrupted by cauſes, which, though unknown, are not the leſs natural and neceſſary, we are confounded ;—we cry out, *a miracle!* and attribute it to a cauſe much more unknown, than any of thoſe, acting before our eyes.

The univerſe is always in order. It cannot be in diſorder. It is our machine alone, that ſuffers, when we complain of diſorder. The bodies, cauſes, and beings, which this world contains, neceſſarily act in the manner, in which we ſee them act, whether we approve or diſapprove of their effects. Earthquakes, volcanos, inundations, peſtilences, and famines are effects as neceſſary, or as much in the order of nature, as the

fall

fall of heavy bodies, the courſes of rivers, the periodical motions of the ſeas, the blowing of the winds, the fruitful rains, and the favorable effects, for which men praiſe God, and thank him for his goodneſs.

To be aſtoniſhed that a certain order reigns in the world, is to be ſurpriſed that the ſame cauſes conſtantly produce the ſame effects. To be ſhocked at diſorder, is to forget, that when things change, or are interrupted in their actions, the effects can no longer be the ſame. To wonder at the order of nature, is to wonder that any thing can exiſt;—it is to be ſurpriſed at one's own exiſtence. What is order to one being, is diſorder to another. All wicked beings find that every thing is in order, when they can with impunity put every thing in diſorder. They find, on the contrary, that every thing is in diſorder, when they are diſturbed in the exerciſe of their wickedneſs.

45. Upon ſuppoſition that God is the author and mover of nature, there could be no diſorder with reſpect to him. Would not all the cauſes, that he ſhould have made, neceſſarily act according to the properties, eſſences, and impulſes given them? If God ſhould change the ordinary courſe of nature, he would not be immutable. If the order of the univerſe, in which man thinks he ſees the moſt convincing proof of the exiſtence, intelligence, power and goodneſs of God, ſhould happen to contradict itſelf, one might ſuſpect his exiſtence, or, at leaſt, accuſe him of inconſtancy, impotence, want of foreſight and wiſdom in the firſt arrangement of things;—one would have a right to accuſe him of an overſight in the choice of the agents and inſtruments, which he makes,

prepares, and puts in action. In ſhort, if the order of nature proves the power and intelligence of the Deity, diſorder muſt prove his weakneſs, inſtability, and irrationality.

You ſay, that God is omnipreſent, that he fills immenſity, that nothing is done without him, that matter could not act without his agency. In this caſe, you admit, that your God is the author of diſorder, that it is he, who deranges nature, that he is the father of confuſion, that he is in man, and moves him at the moment he ſins. If God is every where, he is in me, he acts with me, he is deceived with me, he offends God with me, and combats with me the exiſtence of God. O Theologians! you never underſtand yourſelves, when you ſpeak of God.

46. In order to have what we call *intelligence*, it is neceſſary to have ideas, thoughts, and will; to have ideas, thoughts, and will, it is neceſſary to have organs; to have organs, it is neceſſary to have a body; to act upon bodies, it is neceſſary to have a body; to experience diſorder, it is neceſſary to be capable of ſuffering. Whence it evidently follows, that a pure ſpirit can neither be intelligent, nor affected by what paſſes in the univerſe.

Divine intelligence, ideas, and views, have, you ſay, nothing common with thoſe of men. Very well. How then can men judge, right or wrong, of theſe views; reaſon upon theſe ideas, or admire this intelligence? This would be to judge, admire, and adore that, of which we can have no ideas. To adore the profound views of divine wiſdom, is it not to adore that, of which we cannot poſſibly judge? To admire theſe views, is it not to admire without knowing why? Admira-

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tion is always the daughter of ignorance. Men admire and adore only what they do not comprehend.

47. All thoſe qualities, aſcribed to God by divines, are totally incompatible with a being, who, by his very eſſence, is void of all analogy with human beings. It is true, they imagine they extricate themſelves from this difficulty, by exaggerating the human qualities, attributed to the Divinity; they enlarge them to infinity, where they ceaſe to underſtand themſelves. What reſults from this combination of man with God, or from this *theanthropy?* A mere chimera, of which if any thing be affirmed, the phantom, combined with ſo much pains, inſtantly vaniſhes.

Le Dante, in his canto upon *Paradiſe*, relates, that the Deity appeared to him under the figure of three circles, forming an iris, whoſe lively colours generated each other; but that, looking ſteadily upon the dazzling light, he ſaw only his own figure. While adoring God, it is himſelf, that man adores.

48. Does not the leaſt reflection ſuffice to prove, that God can have none of the human qualities, virtues, or perfections? Our virtues and perfections are diſpoſitions relative to the beings, with whom we live in ſociety. God, according to you, is an inſulated being. God has no equals —no fellow-beings. God does not live in ſociety. He wants the aſſiſtance of no one. He enjoys an unchangeable felicity. Admit then, according to your own principles, that God cannot have what we call virtues, and that men cannot be virtuous with reſpect to him.

49. Man, wrapped up in his own merit, imagines the human race to be the ſole object of

God in creating the univerſe. Upon what does he found this flattering opinion? We are told, upon this; that man is the only being endued with an intelligence, which enables him to know the Deity, and to render homage worthy of him. We are aſſured, that God made the world only for his own glory, and that it was neceſſary that the human ſpecies ſhould come into his plan, that there might be ſome one to admire his works, and glorify him for them. But, according to theſe ſuppoſitions, has not God evidently miſſed his object? 1ſt. Man, according to yourſelves, will always labor under the completeſt impoſſibility of knowing his God, and under the moſt invincible ignorance of his divine eſſence. 2d. A being, who has no equal, cannot be ſuſceptible of glory; for glory can reſult only from the compariſon of one's own excellence with that of others. 3d. If God be infinitely happy, if he be ſelf-ſufficient, what need has he of the homage of his feeble creatures? 4th. God, notwithſtanding all his endeavors, is not glorified; but on the contrary, all the religions in the world repreſent him as perpetually offended;—their ſole object is to reconcile ſinful, ungrateful, rebellious man with his angry God.

50. If God be infinite, he has much leſs relation with man, than man with ants. Would the ants of a garden reaſon pertinently concerning the intentions, deſires and projects of the gardener? Could they juſtly imagine, that the park of VERSAILLES was planted for them alone, by an oſtentatious monarch, and that the ſole object of his goodneſs was to furniſh them with a ſuperb reſidence? But, according to theology, man is, with reſpect to God, far below what the vileſt in-

ſect is to man. Thus, by theology itſelf, which is wholly devoted to the attributes and views of the Divinity, theology appears a complete folly.

51. We are told, that, in the formation of the univerſe, God's only object was the happineſs of man. But, in a world made purpoſely for him, and governed by an omnipotent God, is man in reality very happy? Are his enjoyments durable? Are not his pleaſures mixed with pains? Are many ſatisfied with their fate? Is not man continually the victim of phyſical and moral evils? Is not the human machine, which is repreſented as a maſter-piece of the Creator's ſkill, liable to derangement in a thouſand ways? Should we be ſurpriſed at the workmanſhip of a mechanician, who ſhould ſhew us a complex machine, ready to ſtop every moment, and which would very ſoon break in pieces of itſelf?

52. The generous care, diſplayed by the Deity in providing for the wants, and watching over the happineſs of his beloved creatures, is called *Providence*. But, when we open our eyes, we find that God provides for nothing. Providence ſleeps over the greater part of the inhabitants of this world. For a very ſmall number of men, who are ſuppoſed to be happy, what an immenſe multitude groan under oppreſſion, and languiſh in miſery! Are not whole nations forced to deprive themſelves of bread, to adminiſter to the extravagances of a few gloomy tyrants, who are no happier than their oppreſſed ſlaves?

At the ſame time that our divines emphatically expatiate upon the goodneſs of Providence, while they exhort us to repoſe our confidence in it, do we not hear them, at the ſight of unforeſeen caſtrophes, exclaim, that *Providence ſports with*

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the vain projects of men, that it fruſtrates their deſigns, that it laughs at their efforts, that its profound wiſdom delights to bewilder the minds of mortals? But, ſhall we put confidence in a malignant Providence, who laughs at, who ſports with mankind? How will one have me admire the unknown ways of a hidden wiſdom, whoſe manner of acting is to me inexplicable? Judge of it by effects, you will ſay. I do; and I find, that theſe effects are ſometimes uſeful, and ſometimes hurtful to me.

Men think they juſtify Providence, by ſaying, that, in this world, there is much more good than evil to every individual of mankind. Suppoſing the goods, we enjoy from Providence, are to the evils, as a *hundred* to *ten*; will it not ſtill follow, that, for a hundred degrees of goodneſs, Providence poſſeſſes ten of malignity; which is incompatible with his ſuppoſed perfection.

Almoſt all books are filled with the moſt flattering praiſes of Providence, whoſe attentive care is highly extolled. It would ſeem as if man, to live happy here below, needed not his own exertions. Yet, without his own labor, man could ſubſiſt hardly a day. To live, he is obliged to ſweat, toil, hunt, fiſh, and labor without intermiſſion. Without theſe ſecond cauſes, the firſt cauſe, at leaſt in moſt countries, would provide for none of his wants. In all parts of the globe, we ſee ſavage and civilized man in a perpetual ſtruggle with Providence. He is neceſſitated to ward off the ſtrokes, made by Providence, in hurricanes, tempeſts, froſts, hail, inundations, droughts, and the various accidents, which ſo often render uſeleſs all his labors. In a word, we ſee man continually occupied in guard-

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ing againſt the ill offices of that Providence, which is ſuppoſed to be attentive to his happineſs.

A bigot would admire divine Providence for wiſely ordering rivers to paſs through thoſe places, where men have built large cities. Is not this man's reaſoning as rational as that of ſo many learned men, who inceſſantly talk of *final cauſes*, or who pretend that they clearly perceive the beneficent views of God in the formation of things.

53. Do we ſee then, that Providence ſo very ſenſibly manifeſts herſelf in the preſervation of thoſe admirable works, for which ſhe is honored? If it is ſhe, who governs the world, we find her as active in deſtroying, as in forming, in exterminating, as in producing. Does ſhe not every moment deſtroy, by thouſands, the very men, to whoſe preſervation and welfare we ſuppoſe her continually attentive? Every moment ſhe loſes ſight of her beloved creature. Sometimes ſhe ſhakes his dwelling, ſometimes ſhe annihilates his harveſts, ſometimes ſhe inundates his fields, ſometimes ſhe deſolates them by a burning drought. She arms all nature againſt man. She arms man himſelf againſt his own ſpecies, and commonly terminates his exiſtence in anguiſh. Is this then what is called preſerving the univerſe?

If we could view, without prejudice, the equivocal conduct of Providence to the human race, and all ſenſible beings, we ſhould find, that, far from reſembling a tender and careful mother, ſhe reſembles rather thoſe unnatural mothers, who, inſtantly forgetting the unfortunate fruits of their licentious love, abandon their infants, as ſoon as they are born, and who, content with having

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borne them, expoſe them, helpleſs, to the caprice of fortune.

The Hottentots, in this reſpect much wiſer than other nations, who treat them as barbarians, refuſe, it is ſaid, to worſhip God; becauſe, ſay they, *if he often does good, he often does evil.* Is not this manner of reaſoning more juſt and conformable to experience, than that of ſo many men, who refuſe to ſee, in their God, any thing but goodneſs, wiſdom and foreſight, and that the innumerable evils, of which this world is the theatre, muſt come from the ſame hand, they kiſs with tranſport?

54. The logic of common ſenſe teaches, that we cannot, and ought not, to judge of a cauſe, but by its effects. A cauſe can be reputed conſtantly good, only when it conſtantly produces good, uſeful, and agreeable effects. A cauſe, which produces both good and evil, is ſometimes good, and ſometimes evil. But the logic of theology deſtroys all this. According to that, the phenomena of nature, or the effects we behold in this world, prove to us the exiſtence of a cauſe infinitely good; and this cauſe is God. Although this world is full of evils; although diſorder often reigns in it; although men inceſſantly repine at their hard fate, we muſt be convinced, that theſe effects are owing to a beneficent and immutable cauſe; and many people believe it, or feign to believe it.

Every thing, that paſſes in the world, proves to us, in the cleareſt manner, that it is not governed by an intelligent being. We can judge of a being only by the conformity of the means, which he employs, to attain his propoſed end. The end of God is, it is ſaid, the happineſs of

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man. Yet, a like neceſſity governs the fate of all ſenſible beings, who are born only to ſuffer much, enjoy little, and die. The cup of man is filled with joy and bitterneſs; good is every where attended with evil; order gives place to diſorder; generation is followed by deſtruction. If you tell me, that the deſigns of God are myſterious, and that his ways are impenetrable; I anſwer, that, in this caſe, it is impoſſible for me to judge whether God be intelligent.

55. You pretend, that God is immutable! What then produces a continual inſtability in this world, which you make his empire? Is there a ſtate, ſubject to more frequent and cruel revolutions, than that of this unknown monarch? How can we attribute to an immutable God, ſufficiently powerful to give ſolidity to his works, the government of a nature, in which every thing is in continual viciſſitude? If I imagine I ſee a uniform God in all effects favorable to my ſpecies, what kind of a God can I ſee in their continual diſgraces? You tell me, it is our ſins, which compel him to puniſh. I anſwer, that God, according to yourſelves, is then not immutable; ſince the ſins of men force him to change his conduct towards them. Can a being, who is ſometimes provoked, and ſometimes appeaſed, be conſtantly the ſame?

56. The univerſe can be only what it is; all ſenſible beings there enjoy and ſuffer, that is, are moved ſometimes in an agreeable, and ſometimes diſagreeable manner. Theſe effects are neceſſary; they reſult neceſſarily from cauſes, which act only according to their properties. Theſe effects neceſſarily pleaſe, or diſpleaſe me, by a conſequence of my own nature. This ſame na-

ture compels me to avoid, avert, and reſiſt ſome things, and to ſeek, deſire, and procure others. In a world, where every thing is neceſſary, a God, who remedies nothing, who leaves things to run in their neceſſary courſe,—is he any thing but deſtiny, or neceſſity perſonified? It is a dull, and uſeleſs God, who can effect no change in general laws, and to which he is himſelf ſubject. Of what importance to me is the infinite power of a being, who will do but very little in my favor? Where is the infinite goodneſs of a being, indifferent to my happineſs? Of what ſervice to me is the favor of a being, who, being able to do me an infinite good, does not do me even a finite one?

57. When we aſk, why ſo many miſerable objects appear under the government of a good God, we are told, by way of conſolation, that the preſent world is only a paſſage, deſigned to conduct man to a happier one. They aſſure us, that the earth we inhabit, is a ſtate of trial. In ſhort, they ſhut our mouths, by ſaying, that God could communicate to his creatures neither impaſſibility nor infinite happineſs, which are reſerved for himſelf alone. Can ſuch anſwers be ſatisfactory? 1ſt. The exiſtence of another life is ſupported only by the imagination of men, who, by ſuppoſing it, have only realized the deſire they have of ſurviving themſelves, in order to enjoy hereafter a purer and more durable happineſs. 2dly. How can we conceive that a God, who knows every thing, and muſt be fully acquainted with the diſpoſitions of his creatures, ſhould yet want ſo many experiments, in order to be ſure of their diſpoſitions? 3dly. According to the calculations of our chronologiſts, our earth has exiſted

iſted ſix or ſeven thouſand years. During that time, nations have, under different forms, inceſſantly experienced afflicting viciſſitudes and calamities. Hiſtory exhibits the human ſpecies at all times tormented and ravaged by tyrants, conquerors, and heroes; by wars, inundations, famines, plagues, &c. Are ſuch long trials then likely to inſpire us with very great confidence in the ſecret views of the Deity? Do ſuch numerous and conſtant evils give a very exalted idea of the future fate, his goodneſs is preparing for us? 4thly. If God is ſo kindly diſpoſed, as he is aſſerted to be, without giving men infinite happineſs, could he not at leaſt have communicated the degree of happineſs, of which finite beings are ſuſceptible here below? To be happy, muſt we have an *infinite*, or *divine* happineſs? 5thly. If God could not make men happier than they are here below, what will become of the hope of a *Paradiſe*, where it is pretended, that the elect will for ever enjoy ineffable bliſs? If God neither could nor would avert evil from the earth, the only reſidence we can know, what reaſon have we to preſume, that he can or will avert evil from another world, of which we have no idea? It is more than two thouſand years, according to Lactantius, ſince the ſage Epicurus obſerved; ‘ either God would remove evil out of this world, ‘ and cannot; or he can, and will not; or he has ‘ neither the power nor will; or, laſtly, he has ‘ both the power and will. If he has the will, ‘ and not the power, this ſhews weakneſs, which ‘ is contrary to the nature of God. If he has ‘ the power, and not the will, it is malignity; ‘ and this is no leſs contrary to his nature. If he ‘ is neither able nor willing, he is both impotent

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'and malignant, and conſequently cannot be 'God. If he be both willing and able (which 'alone is conſonant to the nature of God) whence 'comes evil, or why does he not prevent it?" Reflecting minds have been waiting a reaſonable ſolution of theſe difficulties, for more than two thouſand years; and our divines tell us, that they will be removed only in a future life.

58. We are told of a pretended *ſcale of beings*. It is ſuppoſed, that God has divided his creatures into different claſſes, in which each enjoys the degree of happineſs, of which it is ſuſceptible. According to this romantic arrangement, from the oyſter to the celeſtial angels, all beings enjoy a happineſs, which is ſuitable to their nature. Experience explicitly contradicts this ſublime reverie. In this world, all ſenſible beings ſuffer, and live in the midſt of dangers. Man cannot walk without hurting, tormenting, or killing a multitude of ſenſible beings, who are in his way; while he himſelf is expoſed, at every ſtep, to a multitude of evils, foreſeen or unforeſeen, which may lead him to his deſtruction. Is not the idea of death alone ſufficient to diſturb him in his moſt exquiſite enjoyments? During the whole courſe of his life, he is expoſed to pains; he is not ſure, a moment, of his exiſtence, to which he is ſo ſtrongly attached, and which he regards as the greateſt preſent of the Divinity.

59. The world, it will be ſaid, has all the perfection, of which it is ſuſceptible: ſince it is not the God who made it, it muſt have great qualities and great defects. But we anſwer, that, as the world muſt neceſſarily have great defects, it would have been more conformable to the nature of a good God, not to have created a world,

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which he could not make completely happy. If God, who was, according to you, ſupremely happy, before the creation of the world, could have continued to be ſupremely happy, without creating the world, why did he not remain at reſt? Why muſt man ſuffer? Why muſt man exiſt? What imports his exiſtence to God? Nothing, or ſomething? If his exiſtence is not uſeful or neceſſary to him, why did he not ſuffer him to remain in nothing? If his exiſtence is neceſſary to his glory, he had need of man; he was deficient in ſomething before man exiſted. We can pardon an unſkilful workman for making an imperfect work; becauſe he muſt work, well or ill, upon penalty of ſtarving. This workman is excuſable, but your God is not. According to you, he is ſelf-ſufficient; if ſo, why does he make men? He has, you ſay, every thing requiſite to make man happy. Why then does he not do it? Confeſs, that your God has more malice than goodneſs, unleſs you admit, that God was neceſſitated to do what he has done, without being able to do it otherwiſe. Yet, you aſſure us, that your God is free. You ſay alſo, that he is immutable, although beginning and ceaſing in time to exerciſe his power, like the inconſtant beings of this world. O theologians! Vain are your efforts to free your God from all the defects of man.

60. 'Is not God maſter of his favors? Can 'he not give? Can he not take away? It does 'not belong to his creatures to require reaſons 'for his conduct. He can diſpoſe of the works 'of his own hands as he pleaſes. Abſolute ſovereign of mortals, he diſtributes happineſs or 'miſery, according to his good pleaſure.' Thus

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theologians conſole us for the evils, inflicted by God. We reply, that a God, who is infinitely good, cannot be *maſter of his favors;* but would by his nature be obliged to beſtow them upon his creatures; that a being, truly beneficent, cannot refrain from doing good; that a being, truly generous, does not take back what he has given, and that every man, who does ſo, diſpenſes with gratitude, and has no right to complain of finding ungrateful men.

How can the odd and capricious conduct, which theologians aſcribe to God, be reconciled with religion, which ſuppoſes a covenant, or mutual engagements between God and men? If God owes nothing to his creatures, they, on their part, can owe nothing to their God. All religion is founded upon the happineſs that men think they have a right to expect from the Deity, who is ſuppoſed to ſay to them: *Love me, adore me, obey me; and I will make you happy.* Men, on their part, ſay to him: *Make us happy, be faithful to your promiſes, and we will love you, we will adore you, and obey your laws.* By neglecting the happineſs of his creatures, diſtributing his favors according to his caprice, and retracting his gifts, does not God break the covenant, which ſerves as the baſis of all religion? Cicero has juſtly obſerved, that, *if God is not agreeable to man, he cannot be his God.** Goodneſs conſtitutes deity; this goodneſs can be manifeſted to man only by the bleſſings he enjoys; as ſoon as he is unhappy, this goodneſs diſappears, and with it the divinity. An infinite goodneſs can be neither limited, partial, nor excluſive. If God be infinitely good, he owes happineſs to all his creatures. The unhappineſs

* Niſi Deus homini placuerit, Deus non erit.

pineſs of a ſingle being would ſuffice to annihilate unbounded goodneſs. Under an infinitely good and powerful God, is it poſſible to conceive that a ſingle man ſhould ſuffer? One animal, or mite, that ſuffers, furniſhes invincible arguments againſt divine providence and its infinite goodneſs.

61. According to theology, the afflictions and evils of this life are chaſtiſements, which guilty men incur from the hand of God. But why are men guilty? If God is omnipotent, does it coſt him more to ſay, let every thing in the world be in order, let all my ſubjects be good, innocent, fortunate, than to ſay, *let every thing exiſt*? Was it more difficult for this God to do his work well, than to do it ſo ill? Was it farther from the non-exiſtence of beings to their wiſe and happy exiſtence, than from their non-exiſtence to their ſenſeleſs and miſerable exiſtence? Religion tells us of a *hell;* that is, a frightful abode, where notwithſtanding his goodneſs, God reſerves infinite torments for the majority of men. Thus, after having rendered mortals very unhappy in this world, religion tells them, that God can render them ſtill more unhappy in another! The theologian gets over this, by ſaying, that the goodneſs of God will then give place to his juſtice. But a goodneſs, which gives place to the moſt terrible cruelty, is not an infinite goodneſs. Beſides, can a God, who, after having been infinitely good, becomes infinitely bad, be regarded as an immutable being? Can we diſcern the ſhadow of clemency or goodneſs in a God, filled with implacable fury?

62. Divine juſtice, as painted by our divines, is undoubtedly a quality very proper to cheriſh in us the love of the Divinity. According to

the ideas of modern theology, it is evident, that God has created the majority of men with the ſole view of putting them in a fair way to incur eternal puniſhment. Would it not have been more conformable to goodneſs, reaſon, and equity, to have created only ſtones or plants, and not to have created ſenſible beings; than to have formed men, whoſe conduct in this world might ſubject them to endleſs puniſhment in the other? A God, perfidious and malicious enough to create a ſingle man, and then to abandon him to the danger of being damned, cannot be regarded as a perfect being; but, as an unreaſonable, unjuſt, ill-natured, and atrocious monſter. Very far from compoſing a perfect God, theologians have formed the moſt imperfect of beings. According to theological notions, God would reſemble a tyrant, who, having put out the eyes of the greater part of his ſlaves, ſhould ſhut them up in a dungeon, where, for his amuſement, through a trap-door, *incognito*, he would obſerve their conduct, in order to puniſh with rigor all thoſe, who, while groping, ſhould hit againſt each other; but, who would magnificently reward the few, whom he had not deprived of ſight, for their addreſs in avoiding to run againſt their comrades. Such are the ideas, which the dogma of *gratuitous predeſtination* gives us of the divinity!

63. Many people make a ſubtle diſtinction between true religion and *ſuperſtition*; they ſay, that the latter is only a baſe and inordinate fear of the Deity; that the truly religious man has confidence in his God, and loves him ſincerely; whereas, the ſuperſtitious man ſees in him only an enemy, has no confidence in him, and repreſents him to himſelf as a diſtruſtful, cruel tyrant,

ſparing

ſparing of his benefits, laviſh of his chaſtiſements. But, in reality, does not all religion give us the ſame ideas of God? At the ſame time that we are told, God is infinitely good, do they not inceſſantly tell us, that he is very eaſily provoked, that he grants his favors to a few people only, and that he furiouſly chaſtiſes thoſe, to whom he has not been pleaſed to grant them?

64. If we take our ideas of God from the nature of things, where we find a mixture of good and evil, this God, juſt like the good and evil which we experience, muſt naturally appear capricious, inconſtant, ſometimes good, and ſometimes malevolent; and therefore, inſtead of exciting our love, muſt generate diſtruſt, fear, and uncertainty. There is then no real difference between natural religion, and the moſt gloomy and ſervile ſuperſtition. The deiſt ſees God only in a favorable light; the bigot views him in the moſt hideous light. The folly of the one is cheerful, that of the other is melancholy; but both are equally delirious.

65. If I draw my ideas of God from theology, he appears in the character moſt proper to inſpire averſion. Devotees, who tell us, that they ſincerely love their God, are either liars or fools, who ſee their God only in profile. It is impoſſible to love a being, whoſe character ſtrikes us with terror, whoſe judgments make us quake with fear. How can we, without being alarmed, look upon a God, who is reputed to be barbarous enough to damn us?

Let not divines talk to us of a *filial*, or reſpectful fear, mixed with love, which men ought to have for their God. A ſon can by no means love his father, when he knows him to be cruel

enough to inflict upon him ſtudied torments for the leaſt faults he may commit. No man upon earth can have the leaſt ſpark of love for a God, who reſerves chaſtiſements, infinite in duration and violence, for ninety-nine hundredths of his children.

66. The inventors of the dogma of eternal hell-torments have made of that God, whom they call ſo good, the moſt deteſtable of beings. Cruelty in men is the laſt act of wickedneſs. Every ſenſible mind muſt revolt at the bare recital of the torments, inflicted on the greateſt criminal; but cruelty is much more apt to excite indignation, when void of motives. The moſt ſanguinary tyrants, the Caligulas, the Neros, the Domitians, had, at leaſt, ſome motives for tormenting their victims, and inſulting their ſufferings. Theſe motives were, either their own ſafety, or the fury of revenge, or the deſign of frightening by terrible examples, or perhaps the vanity of making a diſplay of their power, and the deſire of ſatisfying a barbarous curioſity. Can a God have any of theſe motives? In tormenting the victims of his wrath, he would puniſh beings, who could neither endanger his immoveable power, nor diſturb his unchangeable felicity. On the other hand, the puniſhments of the other life would be uſeleſs to the living, who cannot be witneſſes of them. Theſe puniſhments would be uſeleſs to the damned, ſince in hell there is no longer room for converſion, and the time of mercy is paſt. Whence it follows, that God, in the exerciſe of his eternal vengeance, could have no other end than to amuſe himſelf, and inſult the weakneſs of his creatures. I appeal to the whole human race;—is there in nature a man,

who feels cruel enough coolly to torment, I do not say his fellow-creature, but any sensible being whatever, without emolument, without profit, without curiosity, without having any thing to fear? Confess then, O theologians! that, even according to your own principles, your God is infinitely more malevolent than the worst of men.

Perhaps you will say, that *infinite offences* deserve infinite punishment. I answer, that we cannot offend a God, who is infinite; that the offences of finite beings cannot be infinite; that a God, who is unwilling to be offended, cannot consent that the offences of his creatures should be eternal; that a God, infinitely good, can neither be infinitely cruel, nor grant his creatures an infinite duration, solely for the pleasure of eternizing their torments.

Nothing but the most savage barbarity, the most egregious roguery, or the blindest ambition could have imagined the doctrine of eternal punishments. If there is a God, whom we can offend or blaspheme, there are not upon earth greater blasphemers than those, who dare to say, that this same God is a tyrant perverse enough to delight, during eternity, in the useless torments of his feeble creatures.

67. To pretend, that God can be offended at the actions of men, is to annihilate all the ideas, which they endeavor to give us, in other respects, of this being. To say, that man can trouble the order of the universe; that he can kindle the thunder in the hand of his God; that he can defeat his projects, is to say, that man is stronger than his God, that he is the arbiter of his will, that it depends upon him to change his

goodneſs into cruelty. Theology continually pulls down, with one hand, what it erects with the other. If all religion is founded upon a God, who is provoked and appeaſed, all religion is founded on a palpable contradiction.

All religions agree in exalting the wiſdom and infinite power of the Deity. But no ſooner do they diſplay to us his conduct, than we ſee nothing but imprudence, want of foreſight, weakneſs and folly. God, it is ſaid, created the world for himſelf; and yet, hitherto he has never been ſuitably honored by it. God created men in order to have, in his dominions, ſubjects to render him their homage; and yet, we ſee men in continual revolt againſt him.

68. They inceſſantly extol the divine perfections; and when we demand proofs of them, they point us to his works, in which, they aſſure us, theſe perfections are written in indelible characters. All theſe works are, however, imperfect and periſhable. Man, who is ever regarded as the moſt marvellous work, as the maſter-piece of the Deity, is full of imperfections, which render him diſagreeable to the eyes of the almighty Being, who formed him. This ſurpriſing work often becomes ſo revolting and odious to its author, that he is obliged to throw it into the fire. But, if the faireſt of God's works is imperfect, how can we judge of the divine perfections? Can a work, with which the author himſelf is ſo little pleaſed, induce us to admire the ability of its Maker? Phyſical man is ſubject to a thouſand infirmities, numberleſs evils, and death.

69. In creating beings more perfect than men, it appears, that heretofore God has not better

ſucceeded,

ſucceeded, nor given ſtronger proofs of his perfection. Do we not ſee, in many religions, that *angels*, pure ſpirits, have revolted againſt their maſter, and even attempted to dethrone him? God propoſed the happineſs of angels and men; yet, he has never been able to render happy either angels or men;—the pride, malice, ſins, and imperfections of the creatures have always oppoſed the will of the perfect Creator.

70. All religion is obviouſly founded upon this principle, that *God does what he can, and man what he will.* Every ſyſtem of religion preſents to us an unequal combat between the Deity on one part, and his creatures on the other, in which the former never comes off to his honor. Notwithſtanding his omnipotence, he cannot ſucceed in rendering the works of his hands ſuch as he would have them. To complete the abſurdity, there is a religion, which pretends, that God himſelf has died to redeem mankind; and yet, men are not farthar from any thing, than they are from what God would have them.

71. Nothing is more extravagant, than the part, theology makes the Divinity to act in every country. Did he really exiſt, we ſhould ſee in him the moſt capricious, and ſenſeleſs being. We ſhould be compelled to believe, that God made the world only to be the theatre of his diſgraceful wars with his creatures; that he created angels, men, demons and evil ſpirits only to make himſelf adverſaries, againſt whom he might exerciſe his power. He renders men free to offend him, malicious enough to defeat his projects, too obſtinate to ſubmit; and all this merely for the pleaſure of being angry, appeaſed, reconciled, and of repairing the diſorder they have made.

Had

Had the Deity at once formed his creatures ſuch as he would have them, what pains would he not have ſpared himſelf, or, at leaſt, from what embarraſſments would he not have relieved his theologians!

Every religion repreſents God as buſy only in doing himſelf evil. He reſembles thoſe empirics, who inflict upon themſelves wounds, to have an opportunity of exhibiting to the public the efficacy of their ointment. But we ſee not, that the Deity has hitherto been able radically to cure himſelf of the evil, which he ſuffers from man.

72. God is the author of all; and yet, we are aſſured that evil does not come from God. Whence then does it come? From man. But, who made man? God. Evil then comes from God. If he had not made man as he is, moral evil or ſin would not have exiſted in the world. The perverſity of man is therefore chargeable to God. If man has power to do evil, or to offend God, we are forced to infer, that God chooſes to be offended, that God, who made man, has reſolved that man ſhould do evil; otherwiſe man would be an effect contrary to the cauſe, from which he derives his being.

73. Man aſcribes to God the faculty of foreſeeing, or knowing beforehand whatever will happen; but this preſcience ſeldom turns to his glory, nor protects him from the lawful reproaches of men. If God foreknows the future, muſt he not have foreſeen the fall of his creatures, whom he had deſtined to happineſs? If he reſolved in his decrees to permit this fall, it is undoubtedly becauſe it was his will that this fall ſhould take place, otherwiſe it could not have happened. If

God's

God's foreknowledge of the ſins of his creatures had been neceſſary or forced, one might ſuppoſe, that he has been conſtrained by his juſtice to puniſh the guilty; but, enjoying the faculty of foreſeeing, and the power of predetermining every thing, did it not depend upon God nót to impoſe upon himſelf cruel laws, or, at leaſt, could he not diſpenſe with creating beings, whom he might be under the neceſſity of puniſhing, and rendering unhappy by a ſubſequent decree? Of what conſequence is it, whether God has deſtined men to happineſs or miſery by an anterior decree, an effect of his preſcience, or by a poſterior decree, an effect of his juſtice? Does the arrangement of his decrees alter the fate of the unhappy? Would they not have the ſame right to complain of a God, who, being able to omit their creation, has notwithſtanding created them, although he plainly foreſaw that his juſtice would oblige him, ſooner or later, to puniſh them?

74. 'Man, you ſay, when he came from the 'hands of God, was pure, innocent and good; 'but his nature has been corrupted, as a puniſh-'ment for ſin.' If man, when juſt out of the hands of his God, could ſin, his nature was imperfect. Why did God ſuffer him to ſin, and his nature to be corrupted? Why did God permit him to be ſeduced, well knowing that he was too feeble to reſiſt temptation? Why did God create a *ſatan*, an evil ſpirit, a tempter? Why did not God, who wiſhes ſo much good to the human race, annihilate once for all ſo many evil genii, who are naturally enemies of our happineſs; or rather, why did God create evil ſpirits, whoſe victories and fatal influence over mankind, he muſt have foreſeen? In fine, by what ſtrange

fatality

fatality in all religions of the world, has the evil principle ſuch a decided advantage over the good principle, or the divinity ?

75. There is related an inſtance of ſimplicity, which does honor to the heart of an Italian monk. One day, while preaching, this pious man thought he muſt announce to his audience, that he had, thank heaven, at laſt diſcovered, by dint of meditation, a ſure way of rendering all men happy. ‘ The devil, ſaid he, tempts man ‘ only to have in hell companions of his miſery. ‘ Let us therefore apply to the Pope, who has the ‘ keys of heaven and hell ; let us prevail upon him to ‘ pray to God, at the head of the whole Church, ‘ to conſent to a reconciliation with the devil, ‘ to reſtore him to favor, to re-inſtate him in his ‘ former rank, which cannot fail to put an end to ‘ his malicious projects againſt mankind.’ Perhaps the honeſt monk did not ſee, that the devil is at leaſt as uſeful as God to the miniſters of religion. They have too much intereſt in their diſſenſions, to be inſtrumental in an accommodation between too enemies, upon whoſe combats their own exiſtence and revenues depend. Let men ceaſe to be tempted and to ſin, and miniſters will be uſeleſs. Manicheiſm is evidently the hinge of every religion ; but unhappily, the devil, invented to clear the deity from the ſuſpicion of malice, proves to us, every moment, the impotence or unſkilfulneſs of his celeſtial adverſary.

76. The nature of man, it is ſaid, muſt neceſſarily be corrupted. God could not communicate to him *impeccability*, which is an inalienable attribute of his divine perfection. But if God could not make man impeccable, why did he give himſelf the pains to make man, whoſe nature

muſt

muſt neceſſarily be corrupted, and who muſt conſequently offend God ? On the other hand, if God himſelf could not make human nature impeccable, by what right does he puniſh men for not being impeccable ? It can be only by the right of the ſtrongeſt ; but the right of the ſtrongeſt is called violence, and violence cannot be compatible with the juſteſt of beings. God would be ſupremely unjuſt, ſhould he puniſh men for not ſharing with him his divine perfections, or for not being able to be Gods, like him.

Could not God, at leaſt, have communicated to all men that kind of perfection, of which their nature is ſuſceptible ? If ſome men are good, or render themſelves agreeable to their God, why has not that God done the ſame favor, or given the ſame diſpoſitions to all beings of our ſpecies ? Why does the number of the wicked ſo much exceed the number of the good ? Why, for one friend, has God ten thouſand enemies in a world, which it depended entirely upon him to people with honeſt men ? If it be true, that, in heaven, God deſigns to form a court of ſaints, of elect, or of men, who ſhall have lived upon earth conformably to his views, would he not have had a more numerous, brilliant, and honorable aſſembly, had he compoſed it of all men, to whom, in creating them, he could grant the degree of goodneſs, neceſſary to attain eternal happineſs ? Finally, would it not have been ſhorter not to have made man, than to have created him a being full of faults, rebellious to his creator, perpetually expoſed to his own deſtruction by a fatal abuſe of his liberty ?

Inſtead of creating men, a perfect God ought to have created only angels very docile and ſubmiſſive.

miſſive. Angels, it is ſaid, are free ; ſome have ſinned ; all have not abuſed their liberty by revolting againſt their maſter. Could not God have created only angels of the good kind ? If God has created angels, who have not ſinned, could he not have created men impeccable, or who ſhould never abuſe their liberty ? If the elect are incapable of ſinning in heaven, could not God have made men impeccable upon earth ?

77. Divines never fail to perſuade us, that the enormous diſtance, which ſeparates God and man, neceſſarily renders the conduct of God a myſtery to us, and that we have no right to interrogate our maſter. Is this anſwer ſatisfactory ? Since, according to you, my eternal happineſs is at ſtake, have I not a right to examine the conduct of God himſelf ? It is only in hope of happineſs, that men ſubmit to the authority of God. A deſpot, to whom men ſubmit only through fear, a maſter, whom they cannot interrogate, a ſovereign totally inacceſſible, can never merit the homage of intelligent beings. If the conduct of God is a myſtery to us, it is not made for us. Man can neither adore, admire, reſpect, nor imitate a conduct, in which every thing is inconceivable, or, of which he can often form only revolting ideas ; unleſs it is pretended, that we ought to adore every thing, of which we are forced to be ignorant ; that every thing, we do not know, becomes for that reaſon an object of admiration. Divines ! You will never ceaſe to tell us, that the deſigns of God are impenetrable, that *his ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts* ; that it is abſurd to complain of his adminiſtration, the motives and ſprings of which we are totally ignorant ; that it is preſumption

to tax his judgments with injuſtice, becauſe they are incomprehenſible. But when you ſpeak in this ſtrain, do you not perceive, that you deſtroy with your own hands all your profound ſyſtems, whoſe only end is to explain to us the ways of the divinity, which, you ſay, are impenetrable ? Have you penetrated his judgments, his ways, his deſigns ? You dare not aſſert it, and though you reaſon about them without end, you do not comprehend them any more than others. If, by chance, you know the plan of God, which you ſeem ſo much to admire, while moſt people find it ſo little worthy of a juſt, good, intelligent and reaſonable being, no longer ſay, this plan is intelligible. If you are as ignorant as we, have ſome indulgence for thoſe, who ingenuouſly confeſs, they comprehend nothing of it, or that they ſee in it nothing divine. Ceaſe to perſecute for opinions, of which you underſtand nothing yourſelves ; ceaſe to defame each other for dreams and conjectures, which every thing ſeems to contradict. Speak of things intelligible and uſeful ; no longer talk to us of the impenetrable ways of God, about which you only ſtammer and contradict yourſelves.

By continually ſpeaking of the immenſe depths of divine wiſdom, forbidding us to ſound them, ſaying it is inſolence to cite God before the tribunal of our feeble reaſon, making it a crime to judge our maſter, divines teach us nothing but the embarraſſment they are in, when it is required to account for the conduct of a God, whoſe conduct they think marvellous, only becauſe to them incomprehenſible.

78. Phyſical evil is commonly regarded as a puniſhment for ſin. Diſeaſes, famines, wars, earthquakes, are means, which God uſes to chaſtiſe

tiſe wicked men. Thus, they make no ſcruple of attributing theſe evils to the ſeverity of a juſt and good God. But, do not theſe ſcourges fall indiſcriminately upon the good and bad, upon the impious and devout, upon the innocent and guilty? How, in this proceeding, would they have us admire the juſtice and goodneſs of a being, the idea of whom ſeems comforting to ſo many wretches, whoſe brain muſt undoubtedly be diſordered by their misfortunes, ſince they forget, that their God is the arbiter, the ſole diſpoſer of the events of this world. This being the caſe, ought they not to impute their ſufferings to him, into whoſe arms they fly for comfort? Unfortunate father! Thou conſoleſt thyſelf in the boſom of Providence, for the loſs of a dear child, or beloved wife, who made thy happineſs. Alas! Doſt thou not ſee, that thy God has killed them? Thy God has rendered thee miſerable, and thou deſireſt thy God to comfort thee for the dreadful afflictions, he has ſent thee!

The chimerical or ſupernatural notions of theology have ſo ſucceeded in deſtroying, in the minds of men, the moſt ſimple, clear, and natural ideas, that devotees, unable to accuſe God of malice, accuſtom themſelves to regard the ſevereſt ſtrokes of fate, as indubitable proofs of celeſtial goodneſs. Are they in affliction, they are ordered to believe, that God loves them, that God viſits them, that God wiſhes to try them. Thus religion has attained the art of converting evil into good! A profane perſon ſaid with reaſon; *If God Almighty thus treats thoſe, whom he loves, I earneſtly beſeech him never to think of me.*

Men muſt have received very gloomy and cruel ideas of their God, who is called ſo good, to

believe

believe that the moſt dreadful calamities, and piercing afflictions are marks of his favor! Would an evil genius, a demon, be more ingenious in tormenting his enemies, than is ſometimes the God of goodneſs, who ſo often exerciſes his ſeverity upon his deareſt friends?

79. What ſhall we ſay of a father, who, we are aſſured, watches without intermiſſion over the preſervation and happineſs of his weak and ſhort-ſighted children, and who yet leaves them at liberty to wander at random among rocks, precipices and waters; who rarely hinders them from following their inordinate appetites; who permits them to handle, without precaution, murderous arms, at the riſk of their life? What ſhould we think of the ſame father, if, inſtead of imputing to himſelf the evil, that happens to his poor children, he ſhould puniſh them for their wanderings in the moſt cruel manner? We ſhould ſay, with reaſon, that this father is a madman, who unites injuſtice to folly.

A God, who puniſhes faults, which he could have prevented, is deficient in wiſdom, goodneſs and equity. A foreſeeing God would prevent evil, and thereby avoid puniſhing it. A good God would not puniſh weakneſſes, which he knew to be inherent in human nature. A juſt God, if he made man, would not puniſh him for not being made ſtrong enough to reſiſt his deſires. To puniſh weakneſs is the moſt unjuſt tyranny. Is it not calumniating a juſt God, to ſay, that he puniſhes men for their faults, even in the preſent life? How could he puniſh beings, whom it belonged to him alone to reform, and who, while they have not *grace*, cannot act otherwiſe than they do?

According

According to the principles of theologians themſelves, man, in his preſent ſtate of corruption, can do nothing but evil, ſince, without divine grace, he is never able to do good. Now, if the nature of man, left to itſelf, or deſtitute of divine aid, neceſſarily determines him to evil, or renders him incapable of good, what becomes of the *free-will* of man? According to ſuch principles, man can neither merit nor demerit; by rewarding man for the good, he does, God would only reward himſelf; by puniſhing man for the evil, he does, God would puniſh him for not giving him grace, without which he could not poſſibly do better.

80. Theologians repeatedly tell us, that man is free, while all their principles conſpire to deſtroy his liberty. By endeavoring to juſtify the Divinity, they in reality accuſe him of the blackeſt injuſtice. They ſuppoſe, that without grace, man is neceſſitated to do evil. They affirm, that God will puniſh him, becauſe he has not given him grace to do good!

Little reflection will ſuffice to convince us, that man is neceſſitated in all his actions, that his free-will is a chimera, even in the ſyſtem of theologians. Does it depend upon man to be born of ſuch or ſuch parents? Does it depend upon man to imbibe or not to imbibe the opinions of his parents or inſtructors? If I had been born of idolatrous or Mahometan parents, would it have depended upon me to become a Chriſtian? Yet, divines gravely aſſure us, that a juſt God will damn without pity all thoſe, to whom he has not given grace to know the Chriſtian religion!

Man's birth is wholly independent of his choice. He is not aſked whether he is willing, or not, to

come

come into the world. Nature does not conſult him upon the country and parents ſhe gives him. His ideas, opinions and notions, true or falſe, are neceſſary fruits of his education, of which he is not maſter. His paſſions and deſires are neceſſary conſequences of the temperament given him by nature, and of the ideas with which he has been inſpired. During his whole life, his volitions and actions are determined by his connexions, habits, buſineſs, pleaſures, converſations, and the thoughts, that are involuntarily preſented to his mind; in a word, by a multitude of events and accidents, which are out of his power. Incapable of looking into futurity, he knows not what he ſhall will, or do, the ſucceeding moment. Man, from the moment of his birth to that of his death, is not free an inſtant. Man, you will ſay, wills, deliberates, chooſes, determines; hence you conclude, that his actions are free. It is true, that man wills, but he is not maſter of his will or his deſires; he can deſire and will only what he judges advantageous to himſelf; he can neither love pain, nor deteſt pleaſure. Man, it will be ſaid, ſometimes prefers pain to pleaſure; but then he prefers a momentary pain with the view of procuring a greater and more durable pleaſure. In this caſe, the proſpect of a greater good neceſſarily determines him to forego a leſs conſiderable good.

The lover does not give his miſtreſs the features, which captivate him; he is not then maſter of loving, or not loving the object of his tenderneſs; he is not maſter of his imagination or temperament. Whence it evidently follows, that man is not maſter of his volitions and deſires. But man, you will ſay, can reſiſt his deſires;

therefore he is free. Man reſiſts his deſires, when the motives, which divert him from an object, are ſtronger than thoſe, which incline him towards it; but then his reſiſtance is neceſſary. A man, whoſe fear of diſhonor or puniſhment is greater than his love of money, generally reſiſts the deſire of ſtealing.

Are we not free, when we deliberate? But, are we maſters of knowing or not knowing, of being in doubt or certainty? Deliberation is a neceſſary effect of our uncertainty reſpecting the conſequences of our actions. When we are ſure, or think we are ſure of theſe conſequences, we neceſſarily decide, and we then act neceſſarily according to our true or falſe judgment. Our judgments, true or falſe, are not free; they are neceſſarily determined by the ideas, we have received, or which our minds have formed.

Man is not free in his choice; he is evidently neceſſitated to chooſe what he judges moſt uſeful and agreeable. Neither is he free, when he ſuſpends his choice; he is forced to ſuſpend it until he knows, or thinks he knows the qualities of the objects preſented to him; or until he has weighed the conſequences of his actions. Man, you will ſay, often decides in favor of actions, which he knows muſt be detrimental to himſelf; man ſometimes kills himſelf; therefore he is free. I deny it. Is man maſter of reaſoning well or ill? Do not his reaſon and wiſdom depend upon the opinions he has formed, and upon the conformation of his machine? As neither one nor the other depends upon his will, they are no proof of liberty. 'If I lay a wager, that I ſhall do, or 'not do a thing, am I not free? Does it not de-'pend upon me to do it or not?' No, I anſwer;

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the desire of winning the wager will necessarily determine you to do, or not to do the thing in question. But, supposing I consent to lose the wager? Then the desire of proving to me, that you are free, will have become a stronger motive than the desire of winning the wager, and this motive will have necessarily determined you to do, or not to do the thing in question.

But, you will say, I feel free. This is an illusion, that may be compared to that of the fly in the fable, who, lighting upon the pole of a heavy carriage, applauded himself for directing its course. Man, who thinks himself free, is a fly, who imagines he has power to move the universe, while he is himself unknowingly carried along by it.

The inward persuasion that we are free to do, or not to do a thing, is but a mere illusion: When we will trace the true principle of our actions, we shall find, that they are always necessary consequences of our volitions and desires, which are never in our power. You think yourself free, because you do what you will; but are you free to will, or not to will, to desire, or not to desire? Are not your volitions and desires necessarily excited by objects or qualities totally independent of you?

81. 'If the actions of men are necessary; if 'men are not free, by what right does society 'punish criminals, who infest it? Is it not very 'unjust to chastise beings, who could not act oth-'erwise than they have done?' If the wicked act necessarily according to the impulses of their evil nature, society, in punishing them, acts necessarily by the desire of preservation. Certain objects necessarily produce in us the sensation of

pain; our nature then forces us to hate them, and avert them from us. A tyger, preſſed by hunger, ſprings upon the man, whom he wiſhes to devour; but this man is not maſter of his fear, and neceſſarily ſeeks means to deſtroy the tyger.

82. 'If every thing be neceſſary, the errors, 'opinions and ideas of men are fatal; and if ſo, 'how or why ſhould we attempt to reform them?' The errors of men are a neceſſary conſequence of their ignorance; their ignorance, prejudice and credulity are neceſſary conſequences of their inexperience, negligence, and want of reflection, in the ſame manner as a delirioufneſs or lethargy are neceſſary effects of certain diſeaſes. Truth, experience, reflection, and reaſon, are remedies calculated to cure ignorance, fanaticiſm and follies, in the ſame manner as bleeding is proper to calm delirioufneſs. But, you will aſk, why does not truth produce this effect upon many diſordered heads? It is becauſe ſome diſeaſes reſiſt all remedies; becauſe it is impoſſible to cure obſtinate patients, who refuſe the remedies preſented to them; becauſe the intereſt of ſome men, and the folly of others neceſſarily oppoſe the admiſſion of truth.

A cauſe produces its effect, only when its action is not interrupted by ſtronger cauſes, which then weaken, or render uſeleſs, the action of the former. It is impoſſible that the beſt arguments ſhould be adopted by men, who are intereſted in error, prejudiced in its favor, and who decline all reflection; but truth muſt neceſſarily undeceive honeſt minds, who ſeek her ſincerely. Truth is a cauſe, which neceſſarily produces its effect, when its impulſe is not intercepted by cauſes, which ſuſpend its effects.

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83. 'To deprive man of his free will, is, it is 'said, to make him a mere machine, an automa-'ton. Without liberty, he will no longer have 'either merit or virtue.' What is merit in man? It is a manner of acting, which renders him eſtimable in the eyes of his fellow-beings. What is virtue? It is a diſpoſition, which inclines us to do good to others. What can there be contemptible in machines, or automatons, capable of producing effects ſo deſirable? MARCUS AURELIUS was a very uſeful ſpring to the vaſt machine of the Roman empire. By what right would a machine deſpiſe a machine, whoſe ſprings facilitate its action? Good men are ſprings, which ſecond ſociety in its tendency to happineſs; the wicked are ill-formed ſprings, which diſturb the order, progreſs, and harmony of ſociety. If, for its own utility, ſociety cheriſhes and rewards the good, it hates, deſpiſes and deſtroys the wicked, as uſeleſs or hurtful.

84. The world is a neceſſary agent. All the beings, that compoſe it, are united to each other, and cannot act otherwiſe than they do, ſo long as they are moved by the ſame cauſes, and have the ſame properties. Do they loſe properties? They will neceſſarily act in a different way. God himſelf, admitting for a moment his exiſtence, cannot be conſidered as a free agent. If there exiſted a God, his manner of acting would neceſſarily be determined by the properties inherent in his nature; nothing would be capable of arreſting or altering his will. This being granted, neither our actions, prayers, nor ſacrifices could ſuſpend, or change his invariable conduct and immutable deſigns; whence we are forced to infer, that all religion would be uſeleſs.

85. Were not divines in perpetual contradiction with themſelves, they would ſee, that, according to their hypotheſes, man cannot be reputed free an inſtant. Do they not ſuppoſe man continually dependent on his God? Is he free, when he cannot exiſt and be preſerved without God, and ceaſes to exiſt at the pleaſure of his ſupreme will? If God has made man out of nothing; if his preſervation is a continued creation; if God cannot, an inſtant, loſe ſight of his creature; if whatever happens to him, is an effect of the divine will; if man can do nothing of himſelf; if all the events, which he experiences, are effects of the divine decrees; if he does no good without grace from on high, how can they maintain, that man enjoys a moment's liberty? If God did not preſerve him in the moment of ſin, how could man ſin? If God then preſerves him, God forces him to exiſt, that he may ſin.

86. The Divinity is frequently compared to a king, whoſe revolted ſubjects are the greater part of mankind; and it is ſaid, he has a right to reward the ſubjects who remain faithful to him, and to puniſh the rebellious. This compariſon is not juſt in any of its parts. God preſides over a machine, every ſpring of which he has created. Theſe ſprings act agreeably to the manner, in which God has formed them; he ought to impute it to his own unſkilfulneſs, if theſe ſprings do not contribute to the harmony of the machine, into which it was his will to inſert them. God is a creating king, who has created to himſelf ſubjects of every deſcription; who has formed them according to his own good pleaſure; whoſe will can never find reſiſtance. If God has rebellious ſubjects in his empire, it is becauſe God

has

has reſolved to have rebellious ſubjects. If the ſins of men diſturb the order of the world, it is becauſe it is the will of God that this order ſhould be diſturbed.

Nobody dares to call in queſtion the divine juſtice; yet, under the government of a juſt God, we ſee nothing but acts of injuſtice and violence. Force decides the fate of nations, equity ſeems baniſhed from the earth; a few men ſport, unpuniſhed, with the peace, property, liberty, and life of all others. All is diſorder in a world governed by a God, who is ſaid to be infinitely diſpleaſed with diſorder.

87. Altho' men are forever admiring the wiſdom, goodneſs, juſtice, and beautiful order of Providence, they are, in reality, never ſatisfied with it. Do not the prayers, continually addreſſed to heaven, ſhew, that men are by no means ſatisfied with the divine diſpenſations? To pray to God for a favor, ſhews diffidence of his watchful care; to pray to him to avert or put an end to an evil, is to endeavor to obſtruct the courſe of his juſtice; to implore the aſſiſtance of God in our calamities, is to addreſs the author himſelf of theſe calamities to repreſent to him, that he ought, for our ſake, to rectify his plan, which does not accord with our intereſt.

The Optimiſt, or he, who maintains that *all is well*, and who inceſſantly cries that we live in *the beſt world poſſible*, to be conſiſtent, ſhould never pray; neither ought he to expect another world, where man will be happier. Can there be a better world than *the beſt world poſſible?* Some theologians have treated the Optimiſts as impious, for having intimated that God could not produce a better world, than that in which we live. Ac-

cording

cording to theſe doctors, it is to limit the power of God, and to offer him inſult. But do not theſe divines ſee, that it ſhews much leſs indignity to God, to aſſert that he has done his beſt in producing this world, than to ſay, that, being able to produce a better, he has had malice enough to produce a very bad one? If the Optimiſt, by his ſyſtem, detracts from the divine *power*, the theologian, who treats him as a blaſphemer, is himſelf a blaſphemer; who offends the *goodneſs* of God in eſpouſing the cauſe of his omnipotence.

88. When we complain of the evils, of which our world is the theatre, we are referred to the other world, where, it is ſaid, God will make reparation for all the iniquity and miſery, which, for a time, he permits here below. But if God, ſuffering his eternal juſtice to remain at reſt for a long time, could conſent to evil during the whole continuance of our preſent world, what aſſurance have we, that, during the continuance of another world, divine juſtice will not, in like manner, ſleep over the miſeries of its inhabitants?

They conſole us for our ſufferings by ſaying, that God is patient, and that his juſtice, though often ſlow, is not the leſs ſure. But do they not ſee, that patience is incompatible with a juſt, immutable, and omnipotent being? Can God then permit injuſtice, even for an inſtant? To temporize with a known evil, announces either weakneſs, uncertainty, or colluſion; to tolerate evil, when one has power to prevent it, is to conſent to the commiſſion of evil.

89. Divines every where exclaim, that God is infinitely juſt; but that *his juſtice is not the juſtice of man.* Of what kind or nature then is

this

this divine juſtice? What idea can I form of a juſtice, which ſo often reſembles injuſtice? Is it not to confound all ideas of juſt and unjuſt, to ſay, that what is equitable in God is iniquitous in his creatures? How can we receive for our model a being, whoſe divine perfections are preciſely the reverſe of human?

'God, it is ſaid, is ſovereign arbiter of our 'deſtinies. His ſupreme power, which nothing 'can limit, juſtly permits him to do with the 'works of his own hands according to his good 'pleaſure. A worm of earth, like man, has no 'right even to complain.' This arrogant ſtyle is evidently borrowed from the language, uſed by the miniſters of tyrants, when they ſtop the mouths of thoſe who ſuffer from their violences. It cannot then be the language of the miniſters of a God, whoſe equity is highly extolled; it is not made to be impoſed upon a being, who reaſons. Miniſters of a juſt God! I will inform you then, that the greateſt power cannot confer upon your God himſelf the right of being unjuſt even to the vileſt of his creatures. A deſpot is not a God. A God, who arrogates to himſelf the right of doing evil, is a tyrant; a tyrant is not a model for men; he muſt be an object execrable to their eyes.

Is it not indeed ſtrange, that in order to juſtify the Divinity, they make him every moment the moſt unjuſt of beings! As ſoon as we complain of his conduct, they think to ſilence us by alledging, that *God is maſter;* which ſignifies, that God, being the ſtrongeſt, is not bound by ordinary rules. But the right of the ſtrongeſt is the violation of all rights; it can ſeem a right only to the eyes of a ſavage conqueror, who in the heat

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of his fury imagines, that he may do whatever he pleaſes with the unfortunate victims, whom he has conquered. This barbarous right can appear legitimate only to ſlaves blind enough to believe, that every thing is lawful to tyrants, whom they feel too weak to reſiſt.

In the boſom of the greateſt calamities, do not devout perſons, through a ridiculous ſimplicity, or rather a ſenſible contradiction in terms, exclaim, that *the Almighty is maſter.* Thus, inconſiſtent reaſoners, you ſincerely believe, that the *Almighty* ſends you peſtilence, that the *Almighty* gives you war, that the *Almighty* is the cauſe of famine, in a word, that the *Almighty*, all this while good, has the will and right to inflict the greateſt evils, you can bear! Ceaſe, at leaſt, to call your God *good*, when he does you evil; ſay not, that he is juſt, ſay that he is the ſtrongeſt, and that it is impoſſible for you to ward off the blows of his caprice.

God, ſay you, *chaſtiſes only for our good.* But what real good can reſult to a people from being exterminated by the plague, ravaged by wars, corrupted by the examples of perverſe rulers, continually cruſhed under the iron ſceptre of a ſucceſſion of mercileſs tyrants, annihilated by the ſcourges of a bad government, whoſe deſtructive effects are often felt for ages? *The eyes of faith* muſt be ſtrange eyes, if with them we can ſee advantages in the moſt dreadful and durable calamities, in the vices and follies with which our ſpecies is afflicted.

90. What ſtrange ideas of divine juſtice muſt Chriſtians have, who are taught to believe, that their God, in view of reconciling to himſelf the human race, guilty, though unconſcious, of the

ſin of their fathers, has put to death his own ſon, who was innocent and incapable of ſinning? What ſhould we ſay of a king, whoſe ſubjects ſhould revolt, and who, to appeaſe himſelf, ſhould find no other expedient than to put to death the heir of his crown, who had no concern in the general rebellion? It is, the Chriſtian will ſay, through goodneſs to his ſubjects, unable of themſelves to ſatisfy divine juſtice, that God has conſented to the cruel death of his ſon. But the goodneſs of a father to ſtrangers does not give him the right of being unjuſt and barbarous to his own ſon. All the qualites, which theology aſcribes to God, reciprocally deſtroy one another. The exerciſe of one of his perfections is always at the expenſe of another.

Has the Jew more rational ideas of divine juſtice, than the Chriſtian? The pride of a king kindles the anger of heaven; *Jehovah* cauſes the peſtilence to deſcend upon his innocent people; ſeventy thouſand ſubjects are exterminated to expiate the fault of a monarch, whom the goodneſs of God has reſolved to ſpare.

91. Notwithſtanding the various acts of injuſtice, with which all religions delight to blacken the Divinity, men cannot conſent to accuſe him of iniquity. They fear, that, like the tyrants of this world, truth will offend him, and redouble upon them the weight of his malice and tyranny. They hearken therefore to their prieſts, who tell them, that their God is a tender father; that this God is an equitable monarch, whoſe object in this world is to aſſure himſelf of the love, obedience and reſpect of his ſubjects; who gives them liberty of acting only to afford them an opportunity of meriting his favors, and of acquiring

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an eternal happineſs, which he does not owe them. By what ſigns can men diſcover the tenderneſs of a father, who has given life to the greater part of his children merely to drag out upon the earth a painful, reſtleſs, bitter exiſtence? Is there a more unfortunate preſent, than that pretended liberty, which, we are told, men are very liable to abuſe, and thereby to incur eternal miſery?

92. By calling mortals to life, what a cruel and dangerous part has not the Deity forced them to act? Thrown into the world without their conſent, provided with a temperament of which they are not maſters, animated by paſſions and deſires inherent in their nature, expoſed to ſnares which they have not power to eſcape, hurried away by events which they could not foreſee or prevent, unhappy mortals are compelled to run a career, which may lead them to puniſhments horrible in duration and violence!

Travellers inform us, that in a country of Aſia reigns a Sultan very abſolute even in his whims. By a ſtrange madneſs, this prince ſpends his time ſeated at a table, upon which are placed three dice and a dice-box. One end of the table is covered with pieces of ſilver, deſigned to excite the avarice of his courtiers and people, by whom the Sultan is ſurrounded. He, knowing the foible of his ſubjects, addreſſes them nearly as follows: *Slaves, I wiſh your happineſs. My goodneſs propoſes to enrich you, and make you all happy. Do you ſee theſe treaſures? Well, they are for you; ſtrive to gain them; let each, in his turn, take the box and dice; whoever has the fortune to throw ſixes, ſhall be maſter of the treaſure. But, I forewarn you, that thoſe who have not the happineſs to*

throw

throw the number required, ſhall be precipitated forever into a dark dungeon, where my juſtice demands that they be burned with a ſlow fire. Upon this diſcourſe of the monarch, the company look at each other affrighted. No one wiſhes to expoſe himſelf to ſo dangerous a chance. *What!* ſays the enraged Sultan, *does no one appear to play? But, you muſt! My glory demands that you play. You will play then; obey without reply.* It is well to obſerve, that the dice of the deſpot are ſo prepared, that out of a hundred thouſand throws, there is but one, which can gain the number required. Thus the generous monarch has the pleaſure of ſeeing his priſon well filled, and his riches ſeldom raviſhed from him. Mortals! this SULTAN is your GOD; his TREASURE is HEAVEN; his DUNGEON is HELL, and you hold the DICE!

93. Divines repeatedly aſſure us, that we owe to Providence infinite gratitude for the numberleſs bleſſings ſhe beſtows upon us. They loudly extol the happineſs of exiſtence. But, alas! how many mortals are truly ſatisfied with their mode of exiſtence? If life has ſweets, with how much bitterneſs is it not mixed? Does not a ſingle chagrin often ſuffice ſuddenly to empoiſon the moſt peaceable and fortunate life? Are there many, who, if it were in their power, would begin again, at the ſame price, the painful career, in which, without their conſent, deſtiny has placed them?

You ſay, that exiſtence alone is a great bleſſing. But is not this exiſtence continually troubled with chagrins, fears, and maladies often cruel and little deſerved? May not this exiſtence, threatened on ſo many ſides, be torn from us

every

every moment? Where is the man, who, after living ſome time in the world, has not been deprived of a dear ſpouſe, beloved child, or conſoling friend, whoſe loſs every moment intrudes upon his thoughts? There are few, who have not been forced to drink of the cup of misfortune; there are few, who have not deſired their end. Finally, it did not depend upon us to exiſt or not to exiſt. Should the bird then be ſo very grateful to the fowler for taking him in his net and confining him in his cage for his diverſion and afterwards for his nouriſhment?

94. Notwithſtanding the infirmities, chagrin and miſery, which man is forced to undergo in this world; in ſpite of the dangers, his alarmed imagination ſhews him in another, he has nevertheleſs the folly to think himſelf the favorite of his God, the object of all his cares, the ſole end of all his works. He imagines, that the whole univerſe is made for him; he arrogantly calls himſelf the *king of nature*, and values himſelf far above other animals. Mortal! upon what canſt thou found thy haughty pretenſions? It is, ſayeſt thou, upon thy ſoul, upon thy reaſon, upon the ſublime faculties, which enable thee to exerciſe an abſolute empire over the beings, which ſurround thee. But, weak ſovereign of the world! art thou ſure, a moment, of the continuance of thy reign? Do not the ſmalleſt atoms of matter, which thou deſpiſeſt, ſuffice to tear thee from thy throne, and deprive thee of life? Finally, does not the king of animals at laſt become the food of worms? Thou ſpeakeſt of thy ſoul! But doſt thou know what a ſoul is? Doſt thou not ſee, that this ſoul is only the aſſemblage of thy organs, from which reſults life? Wouldſt thou then re-

fuſe a ſoul to other animals, who live, think, judge, compare, ſeek pleaſure, avoid pain, like thee, and who often have organs, which ſerve them better than thine? Thou boaſteſt of thy intellectual faculties; but do theſe faculties, of which thou art ſo proud, make thee happier than other animals? Doſt thou often make uſe of that reaſon, in which thou glorieſt, and to which thy religion commands thee not to liſten? Are thoſe brutes, which thou diſdaineſt, becauſe they are weaker or leſs cunning than thou art, ſubject to chagrin, to mental pains, to a thouſand frivolous paſſions, to a thouſand imaginary wants, to which thy heart is a continual prey? Are they, like thee, tormented by the paſt, alarmed at the future? Confined ſolely to the preſent, does not what you call their *inſtinct*, and what I call their intelligence, ſuffice to preſerve and defend them, and to ſupply them with all their wants? Does not this inſtinct, of which thou ſpeakeſt with contempt, often ſerve them better than thy wonderful faculties? Is not their peaceful ignorance more advantageous to them, than thoſe extravagant meditations and worthleſs reſearches, which render thee unhappy, and for which thy zeal urges thee even to maſſacre the beings of thy ſo noble ſpecies? Finally, have theſe beaſts, like ſo many mortals, a troubled imagination, which makes them fear, not only death, but likewiſe eternal torments, by which they think it followed?

AUGUSTUS, hearing that HEROD, king of JUDEA, had put to death his ſons, exclaimed; *It is much better to be* HEROD'S *hog, than his ſon.* As much may be ſaid of man. This dear child of Providence runs far greater riſks than all other animals;—after having ſufferred much in this

world,

world, does he not imagine, that he is in danger of ſuffering eternally in another ?

95. Where is the preciſe line of diſtinction between man and the animals whom he calls brutes ? In what does he differ eſſentially from beaſts ? It is, we are told, by his intelligence, the faculties of his mind, his reaſon, that man appears ſuperior to all other animals, who, in all their actions, move only by phyſical impulſes, in which reaſon has no ſhare. But finally, brutes, having fewer wants than man, eaſily do without his intellectual faculties which would be perfectly uſeleſs in their mode of exiſtence. Their inſtinct is ſufficient ; while all the faculties of man ſcarcely ſuffice to render his exiſtence ſupportable, and to ſatisfy the wants, which his imagination, prejudices and inſtitutions multiply to his torment.

Brutes are not ſtruck by the ſame objects, as man ; they have not the ſame wants, deſires, nor fancies ; they very ſoon arrive to maturity, while the mind of man ſeldom attains to the full enjoyment and free exerciſe of its faculties, and to ſuch a uſe of them, as is conducive to his happineſs.

96. We are aſſured, that the human ſoul is a ſimple ſubſtance. It ſhould then be the ſame in every individual of the human ſpecies, who ought all to have the ſame intellectual faculties ; yet this is not the caſe. Men differ as much in the qualities of the mind, as in the features of the face. There are human beings as different from one another, as man is from a horſe or a dog. What conformity or reſemblance do we find between ſome men ? What an infinite diſtance is there between the genius of a LOCKE or a NEWTON,

TON, and that of a peaſant, Hottentot, or Laplander?

Man differs from other animals only in his organization, which enables him to produce effects, of which they are not capable. The variety, obſervable in the organs of individuals of the human ſpecies, ſuffices to explain the differences in what is called their intellectual faculties. More or leſs delicacy in theſe organs, warmth in the blood, mobility in the fluids, flexibility or ſtiffneſs in the fibres and nerves, muſt neceſſarily produce the infinite diverſity, we obſerve in the minds of men. It is by exerciſe, habit and education, that the mind is unfolded and becomes ſuperior to that of others;—man, without culture and experience, is as void of reaſon and induſtry, as the brute. A ſtupid man is one, whoſe organs move with difficulty, whoſe brain does not eaſily vibrate, whoſe blood circulates ſlowly. A man of genius is he, whoſe organs are flexible, whoſe ſenſations are quick, whoſe brain vibrates with celerity. A learned man is he, whoſe organs and brain have been long exerciſed upon objects to which he is devoted.

Without culture, experience, or reaſon, is not man more contemptible and worthy of hatred, than the vileſt inſects or moſt ferocious beaſts? Is there in nature a more deteſtable being, than a TIBERIUS, a NERO, or a CALIGULA? Have then theſe deſtroyers of the human race, known by the name of conquerors, more eſtimable ſouls than bears, lions, or panthers? Are there in the world animals more deteſtable than tyrants?

97. The ſuperiority, which man ſo unreaſonably arrogates over other animals, ſoon vaniſhes in the eyes of reaſon, when we reflect on human

extravagances.

extravagances. How many animals ſhew more mildneſs, reflexion and reaſon, than the animal, who calls himſelf reaſonable above all others? Are there among men, ſo often enſlaved and oppreſſed, ſocieties as well conſtituted as thoſe of ants, bees or beavers? Do we ever ſee ferocious beaſts of the ſame ſpecies rendezvous in plains to mangle and deſtroy one another without profit? Do we ever ſee religious wars among them? The cruelty of beaſts towards other ſpecies ariſes from hunger, the neceſſity of nouriſhment; the cruelty of man towards man ariſes only from the vanity of his maſters and the folly of his impertinent prejudices.

Speculative men, who imagine, or who endeavor to make us believe, that all in the univerſe was made for man, are much embarraſſed, when we aſk, how ſo many hurtful animals, who continually infeſt our abode, can contribute to the happineſs of man? What known advantage reſults to the friend of the gods, from being bitten by a viper, ſtung by a gnat, devoured by vermin, torn in pieces by a tyger, &c? Would not all theſe animals reaſon as juſtly as our theologians, ſhould they pretend that man was made for them?

An Eastern Tale.

98. At ſome diſtance from BAGDAD, a Dervis, renowned for his ſanctity, paſſed his days in an agreeable ſolitude. The neighboring inhabitants, to obtain an intereſt in his prayers, daily flocked to his hermitage to carry him proviſions and preſents. The holy man without ceaſing gave thanks to God for the bleſſings, with which his providence loaded him. 'O Allah! ſaid he, 'how ineffable is thy love to thy ſervants. What

'have

'have I done to merit the favors, that I receive 'from thy bounty? O Monarch of the ſkies! O 'Father of nature! what praiſes could worthily 'celebrate thy munificence, and thy paternal 'care! O Allah! how great is thy goodneſs to 'the children of men!' Penetrated with gratitude, our hermit made a vow to undertake, for the ſeventh time, a pilgrimage to MECCA. The war, which then ſubſiſted between the PERSIANS and TURKS, could not induce him to defer the execution of his pious enterpriſe. Full of confidence in God, he ſets out under the inviolable ſafeguard of a reſpected habit. He paſſes through the hoſtile troops without any obſtacle; far from being moleſted, he receives, at every ſtep, marks of veneration from the ſoldiers of the two parties. At length, born down with fatigue, he is obliged to ſeek refuge againſt the rays of a ſcorching ſun; he finds it under the cool ſhade of a group of palm-trees, whoſe roots were watered by a limpid ſtream. In this ſolitary place, whoſe peace was diſturbed only by the murmur of waters and the warbling of birds, the man of God finds not only an enchanting retreat, but a delicious repaſt. He has only to put forth his hand to gather dates and other pleaſant fruits; the brook affords him the means of quenching his thirſt; a green turf ſoon invites him to ſleep; upon waking he performs the ſacred ablution, and exclaims in a tranſport of joy; 'O allah! how great is thy 'goodneſs to the children of men!' After his refreſhment, being full of ſtrength and gaiety, our ſaint purſues his way; it leads him for ſome time acroſs a ſmiling country, which preſents nothing to his eyes but flowery hillocks, enamelled meadows, and trees loaded with fruit. Affected by

this ſight, he ceaſes not to adore the rich and liberal hand of providence, which appears every where providing for the happineſs of the human race. Going a little farther, he finds ſome mountains, that are pretty difficult to paſs ; but having once arrived at the ſummit, a hideous ſpectacle ſuddenly appears to his view. His ſoul is filled with horror. He diſcovers a vaſt plain entirely laid waſte with fire and ſword ; he beholds it covered with more than a hundred thouſand carcaſes, the deplorable remains of a bloody battle, lately fought upon this field. Eagles, vultures, ravens and wolves were greedily devouring the dead bodies with which the ground was ſtrewed. This ſight plunges our pilgrim into a gloomy meditation. Heaven by ſpecial favor had enabled him to underſtand the language of beaſts. He heard a wolf, gorged with human fleſh, cry out in the exceſs of his joy ; O Allah ! how great is thy goodneſs to the children of wolves. Thy provident wiſdom takes care to craze the minds of theſe deteſtable men, who are ſo dangerous to our ſpecies. By an effect of thy Providence which, watches over thy creatures, theſe deſtroyers of our race cut one another's throats, and furniſh us with ſumptuous meals. O Allah ! how great is thy goodneſs to the children of wolves !

99. A heated imagination ſees in the univerſe only the bleſſings of heaven ; a calmer mind finds in it good and evil. I exiſt, ſay you ; but is this exiſtence always a good ? ' Behold,' you ſay, ' that ſun, which enlightens us, this earth, which ' for you is covered with crops and verdure, theſe ' flowers, which bloom to regale your ſenſes ; ' theſe trees, which bend under the weight of de-

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'licious fruits, theſe pure waters, which run only 'to quench your thirſt, thoſe ſeas, which embrace 'the univerſe to facilitate your commerce, theſe 'animals, which a foreſeeing nature regenerates 'for your uſe.' Yes; I ſee all theſe things, and I enjoy them when I can. But in many climates, this ſo beautiful ſun is almoſt always hidden from my eyes; in others, its exceſſive heat torments me, creates ſtorms, produces frightful diſeaſes, and parches the fields; the paſtures are without verdure, the trees without fruit, the crops are ſcorched, the ſprings are dried up; I can with difficulty any longer ſubſiſt, and now complain of the cruelties of a nature, which to you always appears ſo beneficent. If theſe ſeas bring me ſpices, wealth, and uſeleſs commodities, do they not deſtroy numberleſs mortals, who are hardy enough to ſeek them? The vanity of man perſuades him, that he is the ſole centre of the univerſe; he creates to himſelf alone a world and a God; he thinks himſelf of ſufficient conſequence to derange nature at his pleaſure; but concerning other animals, he reaſons like an atheiſt. Does he not imagine, that the individuals of ſpecies different from his own are automatons unworthy of the bleſſings of univerſal providence, and that brutes cannot be objects of his juſtice or goodneſs? Mortals regard the happy or unhappy events, health or ſickneſs, life or death, plenty or want, as rewards or puniſhments for the right uſe or abuſe of the liberty, with which they erroneouſly imagine themſelves endowed. Do they reaſon in the ſame manner concerning brutes? No. Although they ſee them, under a juſt God, enjoy and ſuffer, equally ſubject to health and ſickneſs, live and die, like themſelves,

it never occurs to them to aſk by what crimes theſe beaſts could have incurred the diſpleaſure of their Creator? Have not philoſophers, blinded by their religious prejudices, in order to free themſelves from embarraſſment, carried their folly ſo far as to pretend that beaſts have no feeling?

Will men never renounce their fooliſh pretenſions? Will they never acknowledge that nature is not made for them? Will they never ſee that this nature has placed equality among all beings, ſhe has produced? Will they never perceive that all beings, organized or unorganized, are equally made to be born and die, enjoy and ſuffer? Finally, far from having any cauſe to be puffed up with their mental faculties, are they not forced to grant, that theſe faculties often make them more unhappy than beaſts, in which we find neither opinions, prejudices, vanities, nor follies, which every moment decide the welfare of man?

100. The ſuperiority, which men arrogate over other animals, is chiefly founded upon their opinion, that they have the excluſive poſſeſſion of an immortal ſoul. But aſk them what this ſoul is, and they are puzzled. They will ſay it is an unknown ſubſtance, a ſecret power diſtinct from their bodies; it is a ſpirit, of which they have no idea. Aſk them how this ſpirit, which they ſuppoſe, like their God, to be wholly void of extenſion, could combine with their extended, material bodies? and they will tell you, they know nothing about it; that it is to them a myſtery; that this combination is an effect of the omnipotence of God. Theſe are the clear ideas that men form of the hidden, or rather imaginary ſubſtance, which is the main ſpring of all their actions!

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If the ſoul is a ſubſtance eſſentially different from the body, and can have no relation to it, their union would be, not a myſtery, but an impoſſibility. Beſides, this ſoul being of a nature different from the body, muſt neceſſarily act in a different manner; yet we ſee that this pretended ſoul is ſenſible of the motions experienced by the body, and that theſe two ſubſtances, eſſentially different, always act in concert. You will ſay that this harmony is alſo a myſtery; and I will tell you, that I ſee not my ſoul, that I know and am ſenſible of my body only, that it is this body, which feels, thinks, judges, ſuffers and enjoys; and that all theſe faculties are neceſſary reſults of its own mechaniſm, or organization.

101. Although it is impoſſible for men to form the leaſt idea of their ſoul, or the pretended ſpirit, which animates them; yet, they perſuade themſelves that this unknown ſoul is exempt from death. Every thing proves to them, that they feel, think, acquire ideas, enjoy and ſuffer only by means of the ſenſes, or material organs of the body. Admitting even the exiſtence of this ſoul, they cannot help acknowledging, that it depends entirely upon the body, and undergoes, conjointly with it, all its viciſſitudes; and yet it is imagined, that this ſoul has nothing in its nature, ſimilar to the body, that it can act and feel without the aſſiſtance of the body; in a word, that this ſoul, freed from the body, and diſengaged from its ſenſes, can live, enjoy, ſuffer, experience happineſs, or feel excruciating torments. Upon ſuch a tiſſue of conjectural abſurdities is built the marvellous opinion of the *immortality of the ſoul.* If I aſk, what are the motives for believing the ſoul immortal? They immediately anſwer, that it is

becauſe

becauſe man naturally deſires to be immortal. But, becauſe you deſire a thing ardently, can you infer that your deſire will be fulfilled? By what ſtrange logic can we dare affirm, that a thing cannot fail to happen, becauſe we ardently deſire it? Are deſires, begotten by the imagination, the meaſure of reality? The impious, you ſay, deprived of the flattering hope of another life, wiſh to be annihilated. Very well; may they not then as juſtly conclude, from their deſire, that they ſhall be annihilated, as you may conclude from your deſire, that you ſhall exiſt forever?

102. Man dies entirely. Nothing is more evident to him, who has the exerciſe of his reaſon. The human body after death is no longer any thing but a maſs incapable of producing thoſe motions, of which the aſſemblage conſtituted life; we ſee, that it has no longer circulation, reſpiration, digeſtion, ſpeech or thought. It is pretended, that the ſoul is then ſeparated from the body. But to ſay, that this ſoul, with which we are unacquainted, is the principle of life, is to ſay nothing, unleſs that an unknown power is the hidden principle of imperceptible movements. Nothing is more natural and ſimple, than to believe, that the dead man no longer lives; nothing is more extravagant, than to believe, that the dead man is ſtill alive. We laugh at the ſimplicity of ſome nations, whoſe cuſtom is to bury proviſion with the dead, under an idea that it will be uſeful and neceſſary to them in the other life. Is it then more ridiculous or abſurd to ſuppoſe, that men will eat after death, than to imagine, that they will think, that they will enjoy, ſuffer, experience repentance or delight, after the organs, adapted to

produce

produce ſenſations or ideas, are once diſſolved and reduced to duſt ?

103. The dogma of the immortality of the ſoul ſuppoſes the ſoul to be a ſimple ſubſtance ; in a word, a ſpirit. But I aſk again, what is a ſpirit ? ‘ It is, ſay you, a ſubſtance void of extenſion, in- ‘ corruptible, having nothing common with mat- ‘ ter.’ If ſo, how is your ſoul born, how does it grow, ſtrengthen, weaken, be diſordered, and grow old, in the ſame progreſſion as your body ?

To all theſe queſtions you anſwer, that theſe are myſteries. If ſo, you underſtand nothing by them. If you underſtand nothing by them, why do you decide, in the affirmative, a thing, of which you are unable to form the leaſt idea ? To believe or affirm any thing, it is neceſſary, at leaſt, to know in what it conſiſts. To believe in the exiſtence of your immaterial ſoul, is to ſay, that you are perſuaded of the exiſtence of a thing, of which it is impoſſible for you to form any true notion ; it is to believe in words without being able to affix to them any meaning ; to affirm that the thing is as you ſay, is the height of folly or vanity.

104. Are not theologians ſtrange reaſoners ? Whenever they cannot divine the natural cauſes of things, they invent thoſe, which they call *ſupernatural ;* ſuch as ſpirits, occult cauſes, inexplicable agents, or rather words much more obſcure, than the things they endeavor to explain. Let us remain in nature, when we wiſh to account for the phenomena of nature ; let us be ignorant of cauſes too delicate for our organs ; and let us be perſuaded, that, by going beyond nature, we ſhall never ſolve the problems, which nature preſents.

Even upon the hypotheſes of theology, that is, ſuppoſing an all-powerful mover of matter, be

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what right would theologians deny, that their God has power to give this matter the faculty of thought? Was it then more difficult for him to create combinations of matter, from which thought might result, than ſpirits who could think? At leaſt, by ſuppoſing a matter, which thinks, we ſhould have ſome notions of the ſubject of thought, or of what thinks in us; whereas, by attributing thought to an immaterial being, it is impoſſible to form the leaſt idea of it.

105. It is objected againſt us, that materialiſm makes man a mere machine, which is thought very diſhonorable to the whole human ſpecies. But, will it be much more honorable for man, if we hould ſay, that he acts by the ſecret impulſes of ſpirit, or by a certain *I know not what*, that animates him in a manner totally inexplicable.

It is eaſy to perceive, that the ſuppoſed ſuperiority of *ſpirit* over matter, or of the ſoul over the body, has no other foundation than men's ignorance of the nature of this ſoul, while they are more familiarized with matter, with which they imagine they are acquainted, and of which they think they can diſcern the ſprings; but the moſt ſimple movements of our bodies are to every man, who ſtudies them, enigmas, inexplicable as thought.

106. The high value, which ſo many people ſet upon ſpiritual ſubſtance, has no other motive than their abſolute inability to define it intelligibly. The contempt, ſhewn for matter by our metaphyſicians, ariſes only from their familiarity with it. When they tell us, that *the ſoul is more excellent and noble than the body*, they ſay nothing, unleſs that what they know not at all, muſt be far more beautiful, than that, of which they have ſome feeble ideas.

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107. The dogma of another life is inceſſantly extolled, as uſeful. It is maintained, that even though it ſhould be only a fiction, it is advantageous, becauſe it deceives men, and conducts them to virtue. But is it true, that this dogma makes men wiſer and more virtuous? Are the nations, who believe this fiction, remarkable for purity of morals? Has not the viſible world ever the advantage over the inviſible? If thoſe, who are intruſted with the inſtruction and government of men, had knowledge and virtue themſelves, they would govern them much better by realities, than by fictions. But legiſlators, crafty, ambitious and corrupt, have every where found it ſhorter to amuſe nations with fables, than to teach them truths, to unfold their reaſon, to excite them to virtue by ſenſible and real motives, in fine, to govern them in a rational manner. Prieſts undoubtedly had reaſons for making the ſoul immaterial; they wanted ſouls and chimeras to people the imaginary regions, which they have diſcovered in the other life. Material ſouls would, like all bodies, have been ſubject to diſſolution. Now, if men ſhould believe, that all muſt periſh with the body, the geographers of the other world would evidently loſe the right of guiding men's ſouls towards that unknown abode; they would reap no profits from the hope with which they feed them, and the terrors with which they oppreſs them. If futurity is of no real utility to mankind, it is, at leaſt, of the greateſt utility to thoſe, who have aſſumed the office of conducting them thither.

108. 'But, it will be ſaid, is not the dogma of 'the immortality of the ſoul comforting to beings, 'who are often very unhappy here below? Though

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'it ſhould be an error, is it not pleaſing? Is it not
'a bleſſing to man to believe, that he ſhall be able
'to ſurvive himſelf, and enjoy hereafter a happi-
'neſs, which is denied him upon earth?' Thus, poor mortals! you make your wiſhes the meaſure of truth; becauſe you deſire to live forever, and to be happier, you at once conclude, that you ſhall live forever, and that you ſhall be more fortunate in an unknown world, than in this known world, where you often find nothing but affliction! Conſent therefore to leave, without regret, this world which gives the greater part of you much more torment, than pleaſure. Submit to the order of nature, which demands that you, as well as all other beings, ſhould not endure forever. But what will become of me? aſkeſt thou, O mortal! Thou wilt be what thou waſt, millions of years ago. Thou waſt then, I know not what; reſolve then to become inſtantaneouſly *I know not what*, which thou waſt millions of years ago; return peaceably to the univerſal maſs, from which, without thy knowledge, thou cameſt in thy preſent form, and paſs away without murmuring, like all the beings, who ſurround thee.

We are inceſſantly told, that religion has infinite conſolations for the unfortunate, that the idea of the ſoul's immortality, and of a happier life, is very proper to elevate the heart of man, and to ſupport him under the adverſity, which awaits him upon earth. It is ſaid, on the contrary, that materialiſm is an afflicting ſyſtem, calculated to degrade man; that it puts him upon a level with the brutes, breaks his courage, and ſhews him no other proſpect than frightful annihilation, capable of driving him to deſpair, and ſuicide, whenever he is unhappy. The great art of di-

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vines is to blow hot and cold, to afflict and conſole, to frighten and encourage.

It appears by theological fictions, that the regions of the other life are happy and unhappy. Nothing is more difficult than to become worthy of the abode of felicity; nothing more eaſy than to obtain a place in the abode of torment, which God is preparing for the unfortunate victims of eternal fury. Have thoſe then, who think the other life ſo pleaſant and flattering, forgotten, that according to them, that life is to be attended with torments to the greater part of mortals? Is not the idea of total annihilation infinitely preferable to the idea of an eternal exiſtence, attended with anguiſh and *gnaſhing of teeth?* Is the fear of an end more afflicting, than that of having had a beginning? The fear of ceaſing to exiſt is a real evil only to the imagination, which alone begat the dogma of the other life.

You ſay, chriſtian miniſters! that the idea of a happier life is joyous. Admitted. Every perſon would deſire a more agreeable and ſolid exiſtence, than that, he enjoys here below. But, if paradiſe is inviting, you will grant, that hell is frightful. Heaven is very difficult, and hell very eaſy to be merited. Do you not ſay, that a *narrow* way leads to the happy regions, and a *broad* way to the regions of miſery? Do you not often ſay, that *the number of the elect is very ſmall, and that of the reprobate very large?* Is not grace, which your God grants but to a very few, neceſſary to ſalvation? Now, I aſſure you, that theſe ideas are by no means conſoling; that I had rather be annihilated, once for all, than to burn forever; that the fate of beaſts is to me more deſirable than that of the damned; that the opinion,

ion, which relieves me from afflicting fears in this world, appears to me more joyous, than the uncertainty arifing from the opinion of a God, who, maſter of his grace, grants it to none but his favorites, and permits all others to become worthy of eternal torment. Nothing but enthuſiaſm or folly can induce a man to prefer improbable conjunctures, attended with uncertainty and inſupportable fears, to an evident ſyſtem, which muſt encourage.

109. All religious principles are a work of pure imagination, in which experience and reaſon have no ſhare. It is extremely difficult to combat them, becauſe the imagination, once prepoſſeſſed by chimeras, which aſtoniſh or diſturb it, is incapable of reaſoning. To combat religion and its phantoms with the arms of reaſon, is like uſing a ſword to kill gnats; as ſoon as the blow is ſtruck, the gnats and chimeras come hovering round again, and reſume in the mind the place, from which they were thought to have been for ever baniſhed.

When we reject, as too weak, the proofs given of the exiſtence of a God, they inſtantly oppoſe to the arguments, which deſtroy that exiſtence, an *inward ſenſe*, a deep perſuaſion, an invincible inclination, inherent in every man, which holds up to his mind, in ſpite of himſelf, the idea of an almighty being, whom he cannot entirely expel from his mind, and whom he is compelled to acknowledge, in ſpite of the ſtrongeſt reaſons. But whoever will analyze this *inward ſenſe*, upon which ſuch ſtreſs is laid, will perceive, that it is only the effect of a rooted habit, which, ſhutting their eyes againſt the moſt demonſtrative proofs, ſubjects the greater part of men, and often even

the moſt enlightened, to the prejudices of childhood. What avails this inward ſenſe, or this deep perſuaſion, againſt the evidence, which demonſtrates, that whatever implies a contradiction, cannot exiſt?

Prieſts gravely tell us, that the non-exiſtence of God is not demonſtrated. Yet, by all that men have hitherto ſaid of him, nothing is better demonſtrated, than that this God is a chimera, whoſe exiſtence is totally impoſſible; ſince nothing is more evident, than that a being cannot poſſeſs qualities ſo unlike, ſo contradictory, ſo irreconcilable, as thoſe, which every religion upon earth attributes to the Divinity. Is not the theologian's God, as well as that of the deiſt, a cauſe incompatible with the effects attributed to it? Let them do what they will, it is neceſſary either to invent another God, or to grant, that he, who, for ſo many ages, has been held up to the terror of mortals, is at the ſame time very good and very bad, very powerful and very weak, unchangeable and fickle, perfectly intelligent and perfectly void of reaſon, ſyſtem and means; a friend of order and permitting diſorder, very juſt and very unjuſt, very ſkilful and very unſkilful. In ſhort, are we not forced to confeſs, that it is impoſſible to reconcile the diſcordant attributes, heaped together upon a being, of whom we can ſay not a ſingle word without falling into the moſt palpable contradictions? Let any one attribute a ſingle quality to the Divinity, and it is inſtantly contradicted by the effects, aſcribed to this cauſe.

110. Theology might juſtly be defined the *ſcience of contradictions*. Every religion is only a ſyſtem, invented to reconcile irreconcilable notions. By the aid of habit and terror, man becomes

comes obſtinate in the greateſt abſurdities, even after they are expoſed in the cleareſt manner. All religions are eaſily combatted, but with difficulty extirpated. Reaſon avails nothing againſt cuſtom, which becomes, ſays the proverb, *a ſecond nature*. Many perſons, in other reſpects ſenſible, even after having examined the rotten foundation of their belief, adhere to it in contempt of the moſt ſtriking arguments. Whenever we complain of underſtanding nothing in religion, of finding at every ſtep ſhocking abſurdities, of ſeeing impoſſibilities, we are told, that we are not made to underſtand the truths of religion; that reaſon goes aſtray, and is but an unfaithful guide, capable of leading us to perdition; and moreover, that *what is folly in the eyes of men, is wiſdom in the eyes of God*, to whom nothing is impoſſible. In ſhort, to ſurmount, by a ſingle word, the moſt inſurmountable difficulties, preſented on all ſides by theology, they get rid of them by ſaying, theſe are *myſteries!*

111. What is a myſtery? By examining the thing cloſely, I ſoon perceive, that a myſtery is nothing but a contradiction, a palpable abſurdity, a manifeſt impoſſibility, over which theologians would oblige men humbly to ſhut their eyes. In a word, a myſtery is whatever our ſpiritual guides cannot explain.

It is profitable to the miniſters of religion, that people underſtand nothing of what they teach. It is impoſſible to examine what we do not comprehend; when we do not ſee, we muſt ſuffer ourſelves to be led. If religion were clear, prieſts would find leſs buſineſs here below.

Without myſteries there can be no religion; myſtery is eſſential to it; a religion, void of myſ-

teries,

teries, would be a contradiction in terms. The God, who ſerves as the foundation of *natural religion*, or *deiſm*, is himſelf the greateſt of myſteries to every mind, that will attend to it.

112. Every revealed religion is filled with myſterious dogmas, unintelligible principles, incredible wonders, aſtoniſhing recitals, which appear to have been invented ſolely to confound reaſon. Every religion announces a hidden God, whoſe eſſence is a myſtery; conſequently, the conduct, aſcribed to him, is no leſs inconceivable than his eſſence. The Deity has never ſpoken only in an enigmatical and myſterious manner, in the various religions, which he has founded in different regions of our globe; he has every where revealed himſelf only to announce myſteries; that is, to inform mortals, that he intended they ſhould believe contradictions, impoſſibilities, and things to which they were incapable of affixing any clear ideas.

The more myſterious and incredible a religion is, the more power it has to pleaſe the imagination of men, which finds in it continual food. The darker a religion is, the more it appears divine, that is, conformable to the nature of a hidden being, of whom they have no ideas.

It is the property of ignorance to prefer the unknown, the hidden, the fabulous, the marvellous, the incredible, or even the terrible, to what is clear, ſimple and true. Truth does not operate upon the imagination in ſo lively a manner as fiction, which, in other reſpects, every one is able to arrange in his own way. The vulgar aſk no better than to liſten to fables; prieſts and legiſlators, by inventing religions and forging myſteries, have ſerved them to their taſte. They

have thereby attached to themſelves enthuſiaſts, women and fools. Beings of this ſtamp are eaſily ſatisfied with reaſons, which they are incapable of examining. The love of ſimplicity and truth is to be found only among the few, whoſe imagination is regulated by ſtudy and reflection.

The inhabitants of a village are never better pleaſed with their parſon, than when he introduces Latin into his ſermon. The ignorant always imagine, that he, who ſpeaks to them of things they do not underſtand, is a learned man. Such is the true principle of the credulity of the people, and of the authority of thoſe, who pretend to guide nations.

113. To announce myſteries to men, is to give and withhold; it is to talk in order not to be underſtood. He, who ſpeaks only obſcurely, either ſeeks to amuſe himſelf by the embarraſſment, which he cauſes, or finds his intereſt in not explaining himſelf too clearly. All ſecrecy indicates diſtruſt, impotence and fear. Princes and their miniſters make a myſtery of their projects, for fear their enemies ſhould diſcover and render them abortive. Can a good God amuſe himſelf with the perplexity of his creatures? Can a God, enjoying an irreſiſtible power, fear, that his views will be traverſed? What intereſt then could he have in commanding his miniſters to announce to them riddles and myſteries?

It is ſaid, that man, by the weakneſs of his nature, is totally incapable of underſtanding the divine diſpenſations, which can be to him only a ſeries of myſteries; God cannot diſcloſe to him ſecrets, neceſſarily above his reach. If ſo, I anſwer again, that man is not made to attend to the divine diſpenſations; that theſe diſpenſations are

to

to him by no means intereſting ; that he has no need of myſteries, which he cannot underſtand, and conſequently, that a myſterious religion is no more fit for him, than an eloquent diſcourſe is for a flock of ſheep.

114. The Deity has revealed himſelf with ſo little uniformity in the different countries of our globe, that in point of religion, men regard one another with hatred and contempt. The partiſans of the different ſects think each other very ridiculous and fooliſh ; the myſteries, moſt revered in one religion, are objects of deriſion to another. God, in revealing himſelf to mankind, ought, at leaſt, to have ſpoken the ſame language to all, and ſaved their feeble minds the perplexity of enquiring which religion really emanated from him, or what form of worſhip is moſt acceptable in his ſight.

A univerſal God ought to have revealed a univerſal religion. By what fatality then are there ſo many religions upon earth ? Which is the true one among the great number, each of which calls itſelf ſo to the excluſion of all others ? There is great reaſon to believe, that none enjoys this advantage ; diviſion and diſputes upon opinions are indubitable ſigns of the uncertainty and obſcurity of the principles, upon which we build.

115. If religion were neceſſary to all, it ought to be intelligible to all. If this religion were the moſt important concern of men, the goodneſs of God would ſeem to demand, that it ſhould be to them of all things the moſt clear, evident and demonſtrative. Is it not then aſtoniſhing, that this thing, ſo eſſential to the happineſs of mortals, is preciſely that, which they underſtand the leaſt, and about which, for ſo many ages, their teach-

ers have the moſt diſputed ? Prieſts of the ſame ſect have never agreed upon the manner of underſtanding the will of a God, who has been pleaſed to reveal himſelf.

The world, we inhabit, may be compared to a public place, in which are ſeveral empirics, each of whom endeavors to attract the paſſengers by decrying the remedies ſold by his brothers. Each ſhop has its cuſtomers, who are perſuaded, that their quacks poſſeſs the only true remedies ; and notwithſtanding a continual uſe of them, they perceive not the inefficacy of theſe remedies, or that they are as infirm as thoſe, who run after the quacks of a different ſhop. Devotion is a diſorder of the imagination, contracted in infancy ; the devout man is a hypochondriac, who only augments his malady by the application of remedies. The ſage abſtains from them entirely ; he diets with care, and in other reſpects leaves nature to her courſe.

116. To a man of ſenſe, nothing appears more ridiculous, than the opinions, which the partiſans of the different religions with equal folly entertain of each other. A Chriſtian regards the *Alcoran*, that is, the divine revelation announced by MAHOMET, as nothing but a tiſſue of impertinent reveries, and impoſtures inſulting to the divinity. The Mahometan, on the other hand, treats the Chriſtian as an *idolater* and a *dog ;* he imagines he has a right to conquer his country, and force him, ſword in hand, to receive the religion of his divine prophet; he believes, that nothing is more impious and unreaſonable, than to worſhip a man, or believe in the *Trinity*. The proteſtant Chriſtian, who without ſcruple worſhips a man, and firmly believes the inconceivable myſtery of the

trinity,

trinity, ridicules the catholic Chriſtian for believing, furthermore, in the myſtery of *tranſubſtantiation;* he treats him as a madman, as impious and idolatrous, becauſe he kneels to worſhip bread, in which he thinks he ſees the God of the univerſe. Chriſtians of every ſect regard, as folly, the incarnation of *Viſtnou*, the God of the Indies; they maintain, that the only true *incarnation* is that of *Jeſus*, ſon of the God of the univerſe, and of the wife of a carpenter. The deiſt, who calls himſelf the follower of a religion, which he ſuppoſes to be that of nature, content with admitting a God, of whom he has no idea, makes a jeſt of all the myſteries, taught by the various religions in the world.

117. According to a celebrated divine, if a God, who is the greateſt of myſteries, be admitted, it is abſurd not to admit any other. "If "by faith," ſays he, "we believe in a true God, "a ſingular ſubſtance, nothing ſhould appear in"credible. This chief of myſteries being once "admitted, reaſon ought not to be ſhocked at "any other. As for me, I admit a million of "things, which I underſtand not, as readily, as "I believe one truth, that is above my capac"ity." *

Is there any thing more contradictory, impoſſible or myſterious, than the creation of matter by an immaterial being, who, though immutable, operates continual changes in the world? Is any thing more incompatible with every notion of common ſenſe, than to believe, that a ſovereignly good, wiſe, equitable and powerful being preſides over nature, and by himſelf directs the

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* Rational Library, vol. I. p. 84. The above paſſage is taken from Bardouin, of the Society of Jeſus.

movements of a world, full of folly, misery, crimes and disorders, which by a single word, he could have prevented or removed? In fine, whenever we admit a being as contradictory as the God of theology, how can we reject the most improbable fables, astonishing miracles, and profound mysteries?

118. The deist exclaims; *Abstain from worshipping the stern and capricious God of theology; mine is a being infinitely wise and good; he is the father of men, the mildest of sovereigns; it is he, who fills the universe with his benefits.* But do you not see that every thing in this world contradicts the good qualities, which you ascribe to your God? In the numerous family of this tender father, almost all are unhappy. Under the government of this just sovereign, vice is triumphant, and virtue in distress. Among those blessings you extol, and which alone your enthusiasm would see, I behold a multitude of evils of every kind, against which you obstinately shut your eyes. Forced to acknowledge, that your beneficent God, in contradiction with himself, distributes good and evil with the same hand, for his justification you must, like the priest, refer me to the regions of the other life. Invent, therefore, another God, for yours is no less contradictory than that of theologians.

A good God, who does evil, or consents to the commission of evil; a God full of equity, and in whose empire innocence is often oppressed; a perfect God, who produces none but imperfect and miserable works; are not such a God and his conduct as great mysteries, as that of the incarnation?

You bluſh for your fellow-citizens, who allow themſelves to be perſuaded, that the God of the univerſe could change himſelf into a man, and die upon a croſs in a corner of ASIA. The myſtery of the incarnation is to you very abſurd. You think nothing more ridiculous, than a God, who transforms himſelf into bread, and cauſes himſelf daily to be eaten in a thouſand different places. But are all theſe myſteries more ſhocking, than a God, the avenger and rewarder of the actions of men? Is man, according to you, free or not? In either caſe, your God, if he has the ſhadow of equity, can neither puniſh nor reward him. If man is free, it is God, who has made him free; therefore God is the primitive cauſe of all his actions; in puniſhing him for his faults, he would puniſh him for having executed what he had given him liberty to do. If man is not free to act otherwiſe than he does, would not God be the moſt unjuſt of beings, in puniſhing him for faults, which he could not help committing?

The abſurdities, with which all religions abound, are to many people truly ſtriking; but they have not the courage to trace out the ſource, whence theſe abſurdities muſt neceſſarily have flowed. They ſee not, that a God full of contradictions, caprices, inconſiſtent qualities, heating or aſſiſting the imagination of men, has never produced only an endleſs ſucceſſion of chimeras.

119. The divine would ſhut the mouths of thoſe, who deny the exiſtence of a God, by ſaying, that all men, in all ages and countries, have acknowledged the government of ſome divinity or other; that every people upon earth have believed in an inviſible and powerful being, who has

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been the object of their worſhip and veneration; in ſhort, that there is no nation, however ſavage, who are not perſuaded of the exiſtence of ſome intelligence ſuperior to human nature. But, can an error be changed into truth by the belief of all men? A great philoſopher has juſtly obſerved, that *general tradition, or the unanimous conſent of mankind is no criterion of truth.** Another ſage had before ſaid, that *a hoſt of learned men were inſufficient to alter the nature of error and convert it into truth.*†

There was a time, when all men believed, that the ſun moved round the earth, while the latter remained immovable in the centre of the ſyſtem. Little more than two centuries have elapſed, ſince this error was detected. There was a time, when nobody would believe the exiſtence of the antipodes, and when every one was perſecuted, who had temerity enough to maintain it. At preſent, every informed man firmly believes it. All nations upon earth, with the exception however of a few men, who are leſs credulous than the reſt, ſtill believe in ſorcerers, ghoſts, apparitions, and ſpirits; no ſenſible man, however, thinks himſelf obliged to adopt ſuch nonſenſe. But the moſt ſenſible people conſider it their duty to believe in a univerſal ſpirit!

120. All the Gods, adored by men, are of ſavage origin. They have evidently been imagined by ſtupid people, or preſented by ambitious and crafty legiſlators, to ignorant and uncivilized nations, who had neither capacity nor courage maturely to examine the objects, which through terror they were made to worſhip.

By

* Bayle. † Averroes.

By closely examining the God, whom we see still adored in our days, we are forced to acknowledge, that he evidently bears marks of a savage nature. To be savage is to acknowledge no right but force; it is to be cruel beyond measure; to follow only one's own caprice; to want foresight, prudence and reason. Ye nations, who call yourselves civilized! Do you not discern, in this hideous character, the God, on whom you lavish your incense? Are not the descriptions given you of the Divinity, visibly borrowed from the implacable, jealous, revengeful, sanguinary, capricious, inconsiderate humor of man, who has not yet cultivated his reason? O men! You adore only a great savage, whom you regard, however, as a model to imitate, as an amiable master, as a sovereign full of perfection.

The religious opinions of men in every country are ancient and durable monuments of the ignorance, credulity, terrors, and savageness of their ancestors. Every savage is a child fond of the marvellous, and never examines what is calculated to work upon his imagination. Ignorant of the ways of nature, he attributes to spirits, to enchantments and magic, whatever appears to him extraordinary. His priests appear to him sorcerers, in whom he supposes a power purely divine, before whom his confounded reason humbles itself, whose oracles are to him ineffable secrets, which it would be dangerous to contradict.

In point of religion, men have, for the most part, remained in their primitive barbarity. Modern religions are only ancient follies revived, or presented under some new form. If the savage ancients have adored mountains, rivers, serpents, trees, idols of every kind; if the wise EGYPTI-

ANS have paid homage to crocodiles, rats and onions, do we not ſee people, who think themſelves wiſer than they, reſpectfully worſhip bread, into which they imagine, through the enchantments of their prieſts, the divinity has deſcended? Is not the Bread-God the idol of many Chriſtian nations, who, in this reſpect, are as irrational, as the moſt ſavage?

121. The ferocity, ſtupidity and folly of uncivilized man have ever diſcloſed themſelves in religious practices, ſo often either cruel or extravagant. A ſpirit of barbarity ſtill ſurvives, and penetrates the religions even of the moſt poliſhed nations. Do we not ſtill ſee human victims offered to the divinity? To appeaſe the anger of a God, who is always ſuppoſed as ferocious, jealous and vindictive, as a ſavage, do not thoſe, whoſe manner of thinking is ſuppoſed to diſpleaſe him, expire under ſtudied torments, by the command of ſanguinary laws? Modern nations, at the inſtigation of their prieſts, have perhaps improved upon the atrocious folly of barbarous nations; at leaſt, do we find, that it has ever entered the heads of ſavages to torment for opinions, to ſearch the thoughts, to moleſt men for the inviſible movements of their brains?

When we ſee poliſhed and learned nations, ſuch as the ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMANS, &c. continue, notwithſtanding their knowledge, to kneel before the barbarous God of the JEWS, that is, the moſt ſtupid, credulous, ſavage, unſociable people, that ever exiſted on earth; when we ſee theſe enlightened nations divide into ſects, defame, hate and deſpiſe one another for their equally ridiculous opinions concerning the conduct and intentions of this unreaſonable God;

when

when we ſee men of ability fooliſhly devote their time to meditate the will of this God, who is full of caprice and folly, we are tempted to cry out; O mortals, you are ſtill ſavage! In point of religion, you are yet but children!

122. Whoever has formed true ideas of the ignorance, credulity, negligence and ſtupidity of the vulgar, will ſuſpect opinions the more, as he finds them generally eſtabliſhed. Men, for the moſt part, examine nothing. They blindly ſubmit to cuſtom and authority; their religious opinions, above all others, are thoſe, which they have the leaſt courage and capacity to examine; as they comprehend nothing about them, they are forced to be ſilent, or at leaſt are ſoon deſtitute of arguments. Aſk any man among the vulgar, whether he believes in a God? He will be much ſurpriſed, that you can doubt it. Aſk him again, what he underſtands by the word *God?* You throw him into the greateſt embarraſſment; you will perceive, that he is incapable of affixing any real idea to this word, he inceſſantly repeats. He will tell you, that God is God; and you will ſee, he knows neither what he thinks of it, nor his motives for believing in it.

All people ſpeak of a God; but do they agree upon this God? By no means. But diviſion upon an opinion proves not its evidence; it is rather a ſign of uncertainty and obſcurity. Does the ſame man always agree with himſelf in the notions, he forms of his God? No. His idea of him varies with the changes, which his machine experiences; another ſign of uncertainty. Men always agree with themſelves and others in demonſtrative truths. In any ſituation, except that

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of infanity, every one knows that two and two make four, that the fun fhines, that the whole is greater than its part; that juftice is a benefit; that benevolence is neceffary to merit the affection of men; that injuftice and cruelty are incompatible with goodnefs. Are they thus agreed when they fpeak of God? Whatever they think, or fay of him, is immediately deftroyed by the effects they attribute to him.

Afk feveral painters to repref ent a chimera, and each, forming different ideas of it, will paint it in a different manner. You will find no refemblance between the features, each has given to a portrait, that has no original. All theologians, in painting God, paint to us only a great chimera, in whofe features they never agree, whom each arranges in his own way, and who exifts only in each one's brain. There are not two individuals upon earth, who have or can have the fame ideas of their God.

123. It might perhaps with more truth be faid, that men are either fceptics or atheifts, than that they are firmly convinced of the exiftence of a God. How can we be affured of the exiftence of a being, whom we could never examine, of whom it is impoffible to form any permanent idea, whofe various effects upon ourfelves prevent us from retaining an invariable judgment, the notion of whom cannot be the fame in two different minds? How can we imagine ourfelves clearly convinced of the exiftence of a being, to whom we are every moment forced to attribute a conduct, oppofed to the ideas, we had previoufly formed of him? Is it then poffible firmly to believe what we cannot conceive? Is not fuch a belief adhering to the opinions of others without having

having any of our own? Prieſts govern the faith of the vulgar; but do not prieſts themſelves acknowledge, that God is to them incomprehenſible? Confeſs then, that a full and entire conviction of the exiſtence of a God is not ſo general, as is imagined.

Scepticiſm ariſes from a want of motives ſufficient to form a judgment. Upon examining the proofs, which ſeem to eſtabliſh, and the arguments, which combat the exiſtence of a God, ſome perſons have doubted and withheld their aſſent. But this uncertainty ariſes from not having ſufficiently examined. Is it poſſible to doubt of any thing evident? Senſible people ridicule an abſolute ſcepticiſm, and think it even impoſſible. A man, who ſhould doubt of his own exiſtence, or that of the ſun, would appear perfectly ridiculous, or might be ſuſpected of diſſimulation. Is this more extravagant, than to doubt of the non-exiſtence of an impoſſible being? Is it more abſurd to doubt of one's own exiſtence, than to heſitate upon the impoſſibility of a being, whoſe qualities reciprocally deſtroy one another? Do we find greater probability for believing the exiſtence of a ſpiritual being, than the exiſtence of a ſtick without two ends? Is the notion of an infinitely good and powerful being, who cauſes or permits an infinity of evils, leſs abſurd or impoſſible, than that of a ſquare triangle? Let us conclude then, that religious ſcepticiſm can reſult only from a ſuperficial examination of theological principles, which are in perpetual contradiction with the moſt clear and demonſtrative principles.

To doubt, is to deliberate upon the judgment, we ought to form. Scepticiſm is only a ſtate of indetermination,

indetermination, refulting from an inſufficient examination of things. Is it poſſible to be ſceptical in matters of religion, if we will deign to revert to its principles, and cloſely examine the notion of God, who ſerves as its baſis? Doubt generally ariſes either from indolence, weakneſs, indifference, or incapacity. With many people, to doubt is to fear the trouble of examining things, which are thought little intereſting. But religion being preſented to men as their moſt important concern in this and the future world, ſcepticiſm and doubt on this ſubject muſt be a ſource of continual anxiety. Every man, who has not courage to contemplate, without prejudice, the God, upon whom all religion is founded, can never know for what religion to decide; he knows not what he ſhould believe or not believe, admit or reject, hope or fear; in a word, he can no longer reſolve upon any thing.

Indifference upon religion muſt not be confounded with ſcepticiſm. This indifference is founded upon an aſſurance, or upon the probability we find for believing, that religion is not intereſting. A perſuaſion, that a thing, which is pretended to be important, is not ſo, or is only indifferent, ſuppoſes a ſufficient examination of the thing, without which it would be impoſſible to have this perſuaſion. Thoſe, who call themſelves ſceptics in the fundamental points of religion, are commonly either indolent or incapable of examining.

124. In every country upon earth, we are aſſured, that a God has revealed himſelf. What has he diſcovered to men? Has he proved evidently that he exiſts? Has he informed them where he reſides? Has he taught them what he

is,

ſs, or in what his eſſence conſiſts? Has he clearly explained to them his intentions and plan? Does what he ſays of this plan, correſpond with the effects, which we ſee? No. He informs them ſolely, that *he is what he is;* that he is a *hidden God;* that his ways are unſpeakable; that he is exaſperated againſt every one, who has the temerity to inveſtigate his ſecrets, or conſult reaſon in judging of him or his works.

Does the revealed conduct of God anſwer the magnificent ideas, they would give us of his wiſdom, goodneſs, juſtice and omnipotence? By no means. In every revelation, his conduct announces a partial and capricious being, particularly good to his favorite people, but the enemy of all others. If he deigns to appear to ſome men, he takes care to keep all others in an invincible ignorance of his divine intentions. Every revelation evidently announces in God, injuſtice, partiality and malignity.

Do the commands, revealed by God, ſtrike us by their ſublime reaſon or wiſdom? Do they evidently promote the happineſs of the people, to whom the Divinity diſcloſes them? Upon examining the divine commands, I ſee in every country nothing but ſtrange ordinances, ridiculous precepts, impertinent ceremonies, puerile cuſtoms, an etiquette unworthy of the monarch of nature, oblations, ſacrifices and expiations, uſeful indeed to the miniſters of God, but very burthenſome to the reſt of mankind. I ſee likewiſe, that theſe laws often tend to render men unſociable, diſdainful, intolerant, quarrelſome, unjuſt and inhuman to every one, who has not received the ſame revelation, the ſame ordinances, or the ſame favors from heaven.

125. Are the precepts of morality, announced by the Deity, really divine, or ſuperior to thoſe, which every reaſonable man might imagine? They are divine ſolely becauſe it is impoſſible to diſcover their utility. They make virtue conſiſt in a total renunciation of human nature, a voluntary forgetfulneſs of one's reaſon, a holy hatred of one's ſelf. Finally, theſe ſublime precepts often exhibit perfection in a conduct cruel to ourſelves, and perfectly uſeleſs to others.

Has a God appeared? Has he himſelf promulgated his laws? Has he ſpoken to men with his own mouth? I am told, that God has not appeared to a whole people; but that he has always manifeſted himſelf through the medium of ſome favorite perſonages, who have been intruſted with the care of annoſuncing and explaining his intentions to the profane. The people have never been permitted to enter the ſanctuary; the miniſters of the Gods have alone had the right to relate what paſſes there.

126. If in every ſyſtem of divine revelation, I complain of not ſeeing either the wiſdom, goodneſs or equity of a God; if I ſuſpect knavery, ambition or intereſt in the great perſonages, who have interpoſed between us and heaven; it is replied, that God has confirmed by ſhining miracles the miſſion of thoſe, who have ſpoken in his name. But was it not more ſimple to appear himſelf and explain his nature and will? Again, if I have the curioſity to examine theſe miracles, I find, that they are improbable tales, related by ſuſpected people, who had the greateſt intereſt in perſuading others, that they believed them to be the words of the Moſt High.

What

What witneſſes are quoted to induce us to believe incredible miracles? Weak people, who exiſted thouſands of years ago, and who, even though they could atteſt theſe miracles, may be ſuſpected of being duped by their own imagination, and impoſed upon by the tricks of dexterous impoſtors. But, you will ſay, theſe miracles are written in books, which by a conſtant tradition have been tranſmitted to us. By whom were theſe books written? Who are the men, who have tranſmitted and perpetuated them? They are either the founders of religions themſelves, or their adherents and aſſigns. Thus in religion, the evidence of intereſted parties becomes inconteſtable!

127. God has ſpoken differently to every people upon earth. The Indian believes not a word of what He has revealed to the Chineſe; the Mahometan conſiders as fables what He has ſaid to the Chriſtian; the Jew regards both the Mahometan and Chriſtian as ſacrilegious corrupters of the ſacred law, which his God had given his fathers. The Chriſtian, proud of his more modern revelation, indiſcriminately damns the Indian, Chineſe, Mahometan, and even the Jew, from whom he receives his ſacred books. Who is wrong or right? Each exclaims, *I am in the right!* Each adduces the ſame proofs each mentions his miracles, diviners, prophets and martyrs. The man of ſenſe tells them, they are all delirious; that God has not ſpoken, if it is true that he is a ſpirit, and can have neither mouth nor tongue; that, without borrowing the organ of mortals, the God of the univerſe could inſpire his creatures with what he would have them learn; and that, as they are all equally ignorant

norant what to think of God, it is evident that it has not been the will of God to inform them.

The followers of the different forms of worſhip accuſe one another of ſuperſtition and impiety. Chriſtians look with abhorrence upon Pagan, Chineſe and Mahometan ſuperſtition. Roman catholics treat, as impious, proteſtant Chriſtians; and the latter inceſſantly declaim againſt the ſuperſtition of the catholics. They are all right. To be impious, is to have opinions offenſive to the God, we adore; to be ſuperſtitious, is to have of him falſe ideas. In accuſing one another of ſuperſtition, the different religioniſts reſemble humpbacks, who reproach one another with their deformity.

128. Are the oracles, which the Divinity has revealed to nations, remarkable for clearneſs? Alas! no two men interpret them alike. Thoſe, who explain them to others, are not agreed among themſelves; to elucidate them, they have recourſe to interpretations, commentaries and allegories; they diſcover a *myſtical ſenſe* very different from the *literal ſenſe*. Men are every where wanted to explain the commands of a God, who could not, or would not announce himſelf clearly to thoſe, whom he wiſhed to enlighten. God always prefers to uſe the organ of men, who may be ſuſpected of being deceived themſelves, or of having reaſons for wiſhing to deceive others.

129. The founders of religion have generally proved their miſſions by miracles. But what is a miracle? It is an effect directly oppoſite to the laws of nature. But, according to you, who made thoſe laws? God. Thus, your God, who according to you foreſaw every thing, counteracts the laws, which his wiſdom preſcribed to nature!

nature! Theſe laws were then defective, or at leaſt in certain circumſtances they did not accord with the views of the ſame God, ſince he judged it neceſſary to ſuſpend or counteract them.

It is ſaid, that a few men, favored by the Moſt High, have received power to perform miracles. But to perform a miracle, it is neceſſary to have ability to create new cauſes capable of producing effects contrary to thoſe of common cauſes. Is it eaſy to conceive, that God can give men the inconceivable power of creating cauſes out of nothing? Is it credible, that an immutable God can communicate to men power to change or rectify his plan, a power, which by his eſſence an immutable being cannot have himſelf? Miracles, far from doing much honor to God, far from proving the divinity of a religion, evidently annihilate the idea given us of God, of his immutability, incommunicable attributes, and even his omnipotence. How can a theologion tell us, that a God, who muſt have embraced the whole of his plan, who could have made none but perfect laws, and who cannot alter them, is forced to employ miracles to accompliſh his projects, or can grant his creatures the power of working prodigies to execute his divine will? Is it credible, that a God ſhould need the aid of men? An omnipotent being, whoſe will is always fulfilled, who holds in his hand the hearts and minds of his creatures, has only to *will*, to make them believe whatever he deſires.

130. What ſhall we ſay of religions that prove their divinity by miracles, which they take care to render ſuſpected? How can we credit miracles recorded in the ſacred books of the Chriſtians,

where God boaſts of hardening the hearts, and blinding thoſe, whom he wiſhes to deſtroy; where he permits malicious ſpirits and magicians to work miracles as great as thoſe of his ſervants; where it is predicted, that *Antichriſt* ſhall have power to perform prodigies capable of ſhaking the faith even of the elect? This being granted, by what ſigns ſhall we know whether God means to inſtruct or inſnare us? How ſhall we diſtinguiſh whether the wonders, we behold, come from God or the devil?

To remove our perplexity, PASCAL gravely tells us, that *it is neceſſary to judge the doctrine by the miracles, and the miracles by the doctrine; that the doctrine proves the miracles, and the miracles the doctrine.* If there exiſt a vicious and ridiculous circle, it is undoubtedly in this ſplendid reaſoning of one of the greateſt defenders of Chriſtianity. Where is the religion, that does not boaſt of the moſt admirable doctrine, and which does not produce numerous miracles for its ſupport?

Is a miracle capable of annihilating the evidence of a demonſtrated truth? Although a man ſhould have the ſecret of healing all the ſick, of making all the lame to walk, of raiſing all the dead of a city, of aſcending into the air, of ſtopping the courſe of the ſun and moon, can he thereby convince me, that two and two do not make four, that one makes three, and that three make only one; that a GOD, whoſe immenſity fills the univerſe, could have been contained in the body of a Jew; that the ETERNAL can die, like a man; that a God, who is ſaid to be immutable, provident and ſenſible, could have changed his mind upon his religion and reformed his own work by a new revelation?

131. According to the very principles either of natural or revealed theology, every new revelation ſhould be regarded as falſe; every change in a religion emanated from the Deity ſhould be reputed an impiety, a blaſphemy. Does not all reform ſuppoſe, that, in his firſt effort, God could not give his religion either the ſolidity or perfection required? To ſay, that God, in giving a firſt law, conformed to the rude ideas of the people, whom he wiſhed to enlighten, is to pretend that God was neither able nor willing to render the people, whom he was then enlightening, ſo reaſonable as was neceſſary in order to pleaſe him.

Chriſtianity is an impiety, if it is true that Judaiſm is a religion really emanated from a holy, immutable, omnipotent and foreſeeing God. The religion of CHRIST ſuppoſes either defects in the law, which God himſelf had given by Moſes, or impotence or malice in the ſame God, who was either unable or unwilling to render the Jews ſuch as to pleaſe him. Every new religion, or reform of ancient religions, is evidently founded upon the impotence, inconſtancy, imprudence, or malice of the Divinity.

132. If hiſtory informs me, that the firſt apoſtles, the founders or reformers of religions, wrought great miracles, hiſtory alſo informs me, that theſe reformers and their adherents were commonly buffeted, perſecuted and put to death, as diſturbers of the peace of nations. I am therefore tempted to believe, that they did not perform the miracles aſcribed to them; indeed, ſuch miracles muſt have gained them numerous partiſans among the eye-witneſſes, who ought to have protected the operators from abuſe. My incredulity redoubles, when I am told, that th

workers of miracles were cruelly tormented, or ignominiouſly executed. How is it poſſible to believe, that miſſionaries, protected by a God and inveſted with divine power, enjoying the gift of miracles, could not have wrought ſuch a ſimple miracle, as to eſcape the cruelty of their perſecutors ?

Prieſts have the art of drawing from the perſecutions themſelves, a convincing proof in favor of the religion of the perſecuted. But a religion, which boaſts of having coſt the lives of many martyrs, and informs us, that its founders, in order to extend it, have ſuffered unheard of puniſhments, cannot be the religion of a beneficent and omnipotent God. A good God would not permit men, intruſted with announcing his commands, to be abuſed. An all-powerful God, wiſhing to found a religion, would proceed in a manner more ſimple and leſs fatal to the moſt faithful of his ſervants. To ſay that God would have his religion ſealed with blood, is to ſay that he is weak, unjuſt, ungrateful and ſanguinary; and that he unworthily ſacrifices his meſſengers to the views of his ambition.

133. To die for a religion proves not that it is true, or divine; it proves, at moſt, that it is ſuppoſed to be ſuch. An enthuſiaſt proves nothing by his death, unleſs that religious fanaticiſm is often ſtronger than the love of life. An impoſtor may ſometimes die with courage; he then makes, in the language of the proverb, *a virtue of neceſſity*.

People are often ſurpriſed and affected at ſight of the generous courage and diſintereſted zeal, which has prompted miſſionaries to preach their doctrine, even at the riſk of ſuffering the moſt

rigorous

rigorous treatment. From this ardor for the ſalvation of men, are drawn inferences favorable to the religion, they have announced. But in reality, this diſintereſtedneſs is only apparent. He, who ventures nothing, will gain nothing. A miſſionary ſeeks his fortune by the aid of his doctrine; he knows that if he is fortunate enough to ſell his commodity, he ſhall become abſolute maſter of thoſe, who receive him for their guide; he is ſure of becoming the object of their attention, reſpect and veneration; he has every reaſon to believe, that he ſhall want for nothing. Such are the true motives, which kindle the zeal and charity of ſo many preachers and miſſionaries, who traverſe the earth.

To die for an opinion, proves the truth or goodneſs of that opinion no more, than to die in battle proves the juſtice of a prince's cauſe, to whoſe intereſt thouſands have the folly to devote their lives. The courage of a martyr elated with the idea of paradiſe, is not more ſupernatural, than the courage of a ſoldier intoxicated with the idea of glory, or impelled by the fear of diſgrace. What is the difference between an Iroquois, who ſings while he is burning by inches, and the martyr St. Laurent, who upon the gridiron inſults his tyrant?

The preachers of a new doctrine fail, becauſe they are the weakeſt; apoſtles generally practiſe a perilous trade, of which they foreſee the conſequences; their courageous death proves neither the truth of their principles nor their own ſincerity, any more than the violent death of the ambitious or the robber proves, that they were right in diſturbing ſociety, or that they thought themſelves authorized in their villany. The trade

of

of a miſſionary was always flattering to ambition, and little expenſive to the vulgar; theſe advantages have ſufficed to efface every idea of attendant dangers.

134. You tell us, theologians! that *what is folly in the eyes of men, is wiſdom before God, who delights to confound the wiſdom of the wiſe.* But do you not ſay, that human wiſdom is a gift of heaven? In ſaying, this wiſdom diſpleaſes God, is but folly in his ſight, and that he is pleaſed to confound it, you declare that your God is the friend only of ignorant people, and that he makes ſenſible people a fatal preſent, for which this perfidious tyrant promiſes cruelly to puniſh them at ſome future day. Is it not very ſtrange, that one can be the friend of your God, only by declaring himſelf the enemy of reaſon and good ſenſe?

135. According to our divines, *faith is an aſſent without evidence.* Whence it follows, that religion requires us firmly to believe inevident things, and propoſitions often improbable or contrary to reaſon. But when we reject reaſon as a judge of faith, do we not confeſs, that reaſon is incompatible with faith? As the miniſters of religion have reſolved to baniſh reaſon, they muſt have felt the impoſſibility of reconciling it with faith, which is viſibly only a blind ſubmiſſion to prieſts, whoſe authority with many ſeems more weighty, than evidence itſelf, and preferable to the teſtimony of the ſenſes.

" Sacrifice your reaſon; renounce experience; " miſtruſt the teſtimony of your ſenſes; ſubmit " without enquiry to what we announce to you " in the name of heaven." Such is the uniform language of prieſts throughout the world; they agree upon no point, except the neceſſity of never

reaſoning

reaſoning upon the principles, they preſent us, as moſt important to our felicity!

I will not ſacrifice my reaſon, becauſe this reaſon alone enables me to diſtinguiſh good from evil, truth from falſehood. If, as you ſay, my reaſon comes from God, I ſhall never believe that a God, whom you call ſo good, has given me reaſon, as a ſnare, to lead me to perdition. Prieſts! do you not ſee, that, by decrying reaſon, you calumniate your God, from whom you declare it to be a gift?

I will not renounce experience, becauſe it is a guide much more ſure than the imagination or authority of our ſpiritual guides. Experience teaches me, that enthuſiaſm and intereſt may blind and lead them aſtray themſelves, and that the authority of experience ought to have much more influence upon my mind, than the ſuſpicious teſtimony of many men, who I know are very liable to be deceived, or much intereſted in deceiving others.

I will miſtruſt my ſenſes, becauſe I am ſenſible, they may ſometimes miſlead me. But on the other hand, I know that they will not always deceive me. I well know, that the eye ſhews me the ſun much ſmaller than it really is; but experience, which is only the repeated application of the ſenſes, informs me, that objects always appear to diminiſh, as their diſtance increaſes; thus I attain to a certainty, that the ſun is much larger than the earth; thus my ſenſes ſuffice to rectify the haſty judgments, they had cauſed.

In warning us to miſtruſt the teſtimony of our ſenſes, the prieſt annihilates the proofs of all religion. If men may be dupes of their imagination; if their ſenſes are deceitful, how ſhall we

believe

believe the miracles, which ſtruck the treacherous ſenſes of our anceſtors? If my ſenſes are unfaithful guides, I ought not to credit even the miracles wrought before my eyes.

136. You inceſſantly repeat that *the truths of religion are above reaſon.* If ſo, do you not perceive, that theſe truths are not adapted to reaſonable beings? To pretend that reaſon can deceive us, is to ſay, that truth can be falſe; that the uſeful can be hurtful. Is reaſon any thing but a knowledge of the uſeful and true? Beſides, as our reaſon and ſenſes are our only guides in this life, to ſay they are unfaithful, is to ſay that our errors are neceſſary, our ignorance invincible, and that without the extreme of injuſtice, God cannot puniſh us for following the only guides, it was his ſupreme will to give.

To ſay, we are obliged to believe things above our reaſon, is as ridiculous, as to ſay, that God requires us, without wings, to aſcend into the air. To aſſure us, that upon ſome objects we are not allowed to conſult reaſon, is to ſay, that, in the moſt intereſting matter, we muſt conſult only imagination, or act only at random.

Our divines ſay, we muſt ſacrifice our reaſon to God. But what motives can we have to ſacrifice our reaſon to a being, who makes us only uſeleſs preſents, of which he does not intend we ſhall make uſe? What confidence can we put in a God, who, according to our divines themſelves, is malicious enough to harden the heart, to ſtrike with blindneſs, to lay ſnares for us, to *lead us into temptation?* In fine, what confidence can we put in the miniſters of this God, who, to guide us more conveniently, command us to ſhut our eyes?

137. Men

137. Men are perſuaded, that religion is to them of all things the moſt ſerious, while it is preciſely what they leaſt examine for themſelves. In purſuit of an office, a piece of land, a houſe, a place of profit; in any tranſaction or contract whatever, every one carefully examines all, takes the greateſt precaution, weighs every word of a writing, is guarded againſt every ſurpriſe. Not ſo in religion; every one receives it at a venture, and believes it upon the word of others, without ever taking the trouble to examine.

Two cauſes concur to foſter the negligence and careleſſneſs of men, with regard to their religious opinions. The firſt is the deſpair of overcoming the obſcurity, in which even the firſt principles of all religion are neceſſarily enveloped. It is well adapted to diſguſt lazy minds, who, regarding it as nothing but a chaos, judge it impoſſible to be underſtood. The ſecond is, that every one is averſe to being too much bound by ſevere precepts, which all admire in theory, but very few care to practiſe with rigor. The religion of many people is like old family titles, which they have never taken pains to examine, but which they depoſit in their archives, to have recourſe to them occaſionally.

138. The diſciples of PYTHAGORAS paid implicit faith to the doctrine of their maſter; *he has ſaid it*, was to them the ſolution of every problem. The generality of men are not more rational. In matters of religion, a curate, a prieſt, an ignorant monk become maſters of the thoughts. Faith relieves the weakneſs of the human mind, to which application is commonly painful; it is much more convenient to depend upon others, than to examine for one's ſelf. Inquiry being

ſlow and difficult equally diſpleaſes the ſtupid ignorant, and the two ardent. Such is undoubtedly the reaſon that faith finds ſo many partiſans.

The more men are deficient in knowledge and reaſon, the more zealous they are in religion. In every religious faction, a mob of women, aſſembled by their directors, diſplay immoderate zeal for opinions, of which it is evident they have no idea. In theological quarrels, the populace, like ferocious beaſts, fall upon all thoſe, againſt whom their prieſt is pleaſed to excite their fury. A profound ignorance, boundleſs credulity, weak head and warm imagination are the materials, of which are made bigots, zealots, fanatics and ſaints. How can the voice of reaſon be heard by people, who never examine for themſelves, but blindly ſubmit to the guidance of others? Devotees and the populace are, in the hands of their guides, automatons, whoſe motions they direct at pleaſure.

139. Religion is an affair of cuſtom and faſhion. But among the numerous religions in the world, which muſt men chooſe? This inquiry would be too painful and long. They muſt therefore adhere to the religion of their fathers, that of their country, or that of the prince, which, having force on its ſide, muſt be the beſt. Chance alone often decides the religion of a man, and a nation; the FRENCH would now be as good Muſſulmans as they are Chriſtians, had not their anceſtors formerly baffled the efforts of the SARACENS.

If we judge of the intentions of Providence by the events and revolutions of this world, we are compelled to believe, that He is very indif-

ferent

ferent about the various religions upon earth. For thouſands of years, paganiſm, polytheiſm and idolatry were the prevailing religions; we are now aſſured, that during the above period, the moſt flouriſhing nations had not the leaſt idea of God; an idea, regarded as ſo eſſential to the happineſs of men. Chriſtians ſay, that, excepting the Jewiſh people, that is, a handful of wretches, all mankind lived in the groſſeſt ignorance of their duties towards God, and that their notions were inſulting to the Divine Majeſty. Chriſtianity, growing out of Judaiſm, very humble in its obſcure origin, became powerful and cruel under the chriſtian emperors, who, prompted by holy zeal, rapidly ſpread it in their empire by means of fire and ſword, and eſtabliſhed it upon the ruins of paganiſm. MAHOMET and his ſucceſſors, ſeconded by Providence or their victorious arms, in a ſhort time baniſhed the Chriſtian religion from a part of ASIA, AFRICA, and even EUROPE; the *goſpel* was then forced to yield to the *alcoran*.

In all the factions or ſects, which, for many ages, have torn in pieces the chriſtians, *the argument of the ſtrongeſt was always the beſt*; the arms and will of princes alone decided the doctrine moſt conducive to the happineſs of nations. May we not infer from it, either that the Deity feels little intereſted in the religion of men, or that he always declares in favor of opinions, which beſt ſuit the intereſt of earthly powers; in fine, that he changes ſyſtems to accommodate their fancy?

A king of MACASSER, tired of the idolatry of his fathers, took a fancy to abandon it. The council of the monarch deliberated a long time to decide whether they ſhould ſend for Chriſtian

or Mahometan divines. Utterly incapable of diſcerning the beſt of the two religions, they reſolved to ſend for miſſionaries of both at the ſame time, and embrace the doctrine of thoſe, who ſhould have the fortune to arrive firſt. It was not doubted, that God, who diſpoſes the winds, would thus explain his will himſelf. The miſſionaries of MAHOMET being moſt diligent, the king and his people did as had been reſolved; the miſſionaries of CHRIST were rejected through the fault of their God, who prevented their ſeaſonable arrival.* God evidently conſents that chance ſhould decide the religion of nations.

Rulers infallibly decide the religion of the people. The true religion is always the religion of the prince; the true God is the God, whom the prince deſires his people to adore; the will of the prieſts, who govern the prince, always becomes the will of God. A wit juſtly obſerved, that *the true religion is always that, on whoſe ſide are the prince and the hangman.* Emperors and hangmen long ſupported the gods of Rome againſt the God of Chriſtians; the latter, having gained to his intereſt the emperors, their ſoldiers and hangmen, ſucceeded in deſtroying the worſhip of the Roman gods. The God of MAHOMET has diſpoſſeſſed the God of Chriſtians of a great part of the dominions, which he formerly occupied.

In the eaſtern part of ASIA, is a vaſt, flouriſhing, fertile, populous country, governed by ſuch wiſe laws, that the fierceſt conquerors have adopted them with reſpect. I mean China. Excepting Chriſtianity, which was baniſhed as dangerous, the people there follow ſuch ſuperſtitions as they pleaſe, while the *mandarins*, or

* See the hiſtorical account of the kingdom of MACASSER, Paris, 1688.

or magiſtrates, having long known the errors of the popular religion, are vigilant to prevent the *bonzes* or prieſts from uſing it as an inſtrument of diſcord. Yet we ſee not, that Providence refuſes his bleſſings to a nation, whoſe chiefs are ſo indifferent about the worſhip, that is rendered to him. On the contrary, the CHINESE enjoy a happineſs and repoſe worthy to be envied by ſo many nations, who are ravaged and often conſumed by diſcordant religions.

We cannot reaſonably propoſe to diveſt the people of their follies; but we may perhaps cure the follies of thoſe, who govern the people. They will then prevent the follies of the people from becoming dangerous. Superſtition is to be feared only when princes and ſoldiers rally round her ſtandard; then ſhe becomes cruel and ſanguinary. Every ſovereign, who is the protector of one ſect or religious faction, is commonly the tyrant of others, and becomes himſelf the moſt cruel diſturber of the peace of his dominions.

140. It is inceſſantly repeated, and many ſenſible perſons at length believe it, that religion is a reſtraint neceſſary to men; that without it, there would no longer exiſt the leaſt check to their paſſions; that morality and virtue are intimately connected with it. "The fear of the "Lord," cries the prieſt, "is the beginning of "wiſdom. The terrors of another life are *ſalu-* "*tary*, and proper to curb the paſſions of men."

To perceive the inutility of religious notions, we have only to open our eyes and inquire what are the morals of nations, moſt under the dominion of religion. We there find proud tyrants, oppreſſive miniſters, perfidious courtiers, number-

leſs

leſs extortioners, corrupt magiſtrates, knaves, adulterers, debauchees, proſtitutes, thieves, and rogues of every kind, who have never doubted either of the exiſtence of an avenging and rewarding God, of the torments of hell, or the joys of paradiſe.

Without the leaſt utility to the greater part of mankind, the miniſters of religion have ſtudied to render death terrible to the eyes of their followers. To be conſiſtent, Chriſtians ought to paſs their whole life in tears, and die under the moſt dreadful apprehenſions. What more terrible than death to the unfortunate, who are told, *that it is horrible to fall into the hands of the living God; that we muſt work out our ſalvation with fear and trembling!* Yet we are aſſured, the death of the Chriſtian is attended with infinite conſolations, of which the infidel is deſtitute. The good Chriſtian, it is ſaid, dies in the firm hope of eternal happineſs, which he has ſtrived to merit. But is not this firm aſſurance itſelf a preſumption puniſhable in the ſight of a ſevere God? Ought not the greateſt ſaints to be ignorant whether they are *worthy of love or hatred?* Ye Prieſts! who are ſilent upon the torments of hell, while conſoling us with the hope of the joys of paradiſe; have you then had the advantage to ſee your names and ours inſcribed *in the book of life?*

141. To oppoſe to the paſſions and preſent intereſts of men, the obſcure notions of a metaphyſical, inconceivable God, the incredible puniſhments of another life, or the pleaſures of heaven, of which nobody has the leaſt idea, is it not to combat realities by fictions? Men have always confuſed ideas of their God; they ſee him, if I may ſo expreſs it, only in clouds; they never think of

him

him, when they are desirous to do evil; whenever ambition, fortune, or pleasure allures them, the God, his threatenings and promises are forgotten. In the things of this life, there is a degree of certainty, which the most lively faith cannot give to the things of the other life.

Every religion was originally a curb, invented by legislators, who wished to establish their authority over the minds of rude nations. Like nurses who frighten children to oblige them to be quiet, the ambitious have used the name of gods to frighten savages; terror was thought proper to make them quietly support the yoke, they wished to impose. Are then the bugbears of infancy made for riper age? At the age of maturity, man no longer believes them, or if he does, they excite little emotion, and never alter his conduct.

142. Almost every man fears what he sees, much more, than what he does not see; he fears the judgments of men, of which he feels the effects, more than the judgments of a God, of whom he has only fluctuating ideas. The desire of pleasing the world, the torrent of custom, the fear of ridicule, are much stronger than any religious opinions. Does not the military man, through fear of disgrace, daily expose his life in battle, even at the risk of incurring eternal damnation?

The most religious persons are often more restrained by the presence of a valet, than of God. A man, who firmly believes that God sees every thing, is omniscient and omnipresent, will be guilty, when alone, of actions, at which he would blush in presence of the meanest of mortals. Those, who pretend to be most fully convinced of

the exiſtence of a God, every moment act as if they believed the contrary.

143. 'Let us, at leaſt, it will be ſaid, cheriſh 'the idea of a God, which alone may ſerve as a 'barrier to the paſſions of kings.' But, can we ſincerely admire the wonderful effects, which the fear of this God generally produces upon the minds of princes, who are called his images? What idea ſhall we form of the original, if we judge by its copies!

Sovereigns, it is true, call themſelves the repreſentatives of God, his vicegerents upon earth. But does the fear of a maſter, more powerful than they, incline them ſeriouſly to ſtudy the welfare of the nations, whom Providence has intruſted to their care? Does the pretended terror, inſpired by the idea of an invifible judge, to whom alone they acknowledge themſelves accountable for their actions, render them more equitable, compaſſionate, ſparing of the blood and treaſure of their ſubjects, temperate in their pleaſures or attentive to their duties? In fine, does this God, by whoſe authority kings reign, deter them from accumulating oppreſſive burdens upon their ſubjects, to whom they ought to act as guides, protectors and fathers? Alas! If we ſurvey the whole earth, we ſhall ſee men almoſt every where governed by tyrants, who uſe religion merely as an inſtrument to render more ſtupid the ſlaves, whom they ſink under the weight of their vices, or without pity ſacrifice to their fatal extravagances.

Far from being a check upon the paſſions of kings, religion, by its very principles, frees them from all reſtraint. It transforms them into divinities, whoſe caprice nations are never permitted to reſiſt. While it gives up the reins to princes,

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and on their part breaks the bonds of the ſocial compact, it endeavors to chain the minds and hands of their oppreſſed ſubjects. Is it then ſurpriſing, that the gods of the earth imagine every thing lawful for them, and regard their ſubjects only as vile inſtruments of their caprice or ambition ?

In every country, religion has repreſented the Monarch of nature as a cruel, fantaſtical, partial tyrant, whoſe caprice is law ; the Monarch God is but too faithfully imitated by his repreſentatives upon earth. Religion ſeems every where invented ſolely to lull the people in the lap of ſlavery, that their maſters might eaſily devour them, or render them wretched with impunity.

144. To guard againſt the enterpriſes of a haughty pontiff, who wiſhed to govern kings, to ſhelter their perſons from the attempts of credulous people, ſeveral European princes, excited by their prieſts, have pretended to hold their crowns and rights of God alone, and to be accountable only to him for their actions. After a long conteſt between the civil and ſpritual power, the former at length triumphed ; and the prieſts, forced to yield, acknowledged the divine rights of kings, and preached them to the people, reſerving the liberty of changing their minds and preaching revolt, whenever the divine rights of kings claſhed with the divine rights of the clergy. It was always at the expenſe of nations, that peace was concluded between kings and prieſts ; but the latter, in ſpite of treaties, always preſerved their pretenſions.

Tyrants and wicked princes, whoſe conſciences continually reproach them with negligence or perverſity, far from fearing their God, had rather

deal with this inviſible judge, who never oppoſes them, or with his prieſts, who are always condeſcending to the rulers of the earth, than withtheir own ſubjects. The people, reduced to deſpair, might probably *appeal* from the divine rights of their chiefs. Men, when oppreſſed to the laſt degree, ſometimes become turbulent, and the divine rights of the tyrant are then forced to yield to the natural rights of the ſubjects.

It is cheaper dealing with gods than men. Kings are accountable for their actions to God alone ; prieſts are accountable only to themſelves ; there is much reaſon to believe, that both are more confident of the indulgence of heaven, than of earth. It is much eaſier to eſcape the vengeance of gods, who may be cheaply appeaſed, than the vengeance of men, whoſe patience is exhauſted.

'If you remove the fear of an inviſible power, 'what reſtraint will you impoſe upon the paſſions 'of ſovereigns?' Let them learn to reign ; let them learn to be juſt ; to reſpect the rights of the people, to acknowledge the favors of the nations, from whom they hold their greatneſs and power ; let them learn to fear men, to ſubmit to the laws of equity ; let nobody tranſgreſs theſe laws with impunity, and let them be equally binding upon the powerful and weak, the great and ſmall, the ſovereign and ſubjects.

The fear of gods, religion, and the terrors of another life, are the metaphyſical and ſupernatural dikes, oppoſed to the impetuous paſſions of princes ! Are theſe dikes effectual? Let experience reſolve the queſtion. To oppoſe religion to the wickedneſs of tyrants, is to wiſh, that vague, uncertain, unintelligible ſpeculations may be

ſtronger

ſtronger, than their propenſities, which every thing conſpires daily to ſtrengthen.

145. The immenſe ſervice of religion to politics is inceſſantly boaſted; but, little reflection will convince us, that religious opinions equally blind both ſovereigns and people, and never enlighten them upon their true duties or intereſts. Religion but too often forms licentious, immoral deſpots, obeyed by ſlaves, whom every thing obliges to conform to their views.

For want of having ſtudied or known the true principles of adminiſtration, the object and rights of ſocial life, the real intereſts of men and their reciprocal duties, princes, in almoſt every country, have become licentious, abſolute and perverſe; and their ſubjects abject, wicked and unhappy. To avoid the trouble of applying to theſe important objects, recourſe was had to chimeras, which, far from ſerving as a remedy, have hitherto only multiplied the evils of mankind, and diverted them from objects moſt eſſential to their happineſs.

Does not the unjuſt and cruel manner, in which ſo many nations are governed here below, manifeſtly furniſh one of the ſtrongeſt proofs, not only of the ſmall effect produced by the fear of another life, but alſo of the non-exiſtence of a Providence, who concerns himſelf with the fate of the human race? If there exiſted a good God, ſhould we not be forced to admit, that in this life he ſtrangely neglects the greater part of mankind? It would ſeem, that this God has created nations only to be the ſport of the paſſions and follies of his repreſentatives upon earth.

146. By reading hiſtory with a little attention, we ſhall perceive that Chriſtianity, weak in the

beginning, was eſtabliſhed among the ſavage and free nations of EUROPE by ſhewing their chiefs, that its religious principles favored deſpotiſm and rendered them abſolute. Conſequently, we ſee barbarous princes ſuddenly converted; that is, they adopt, without examination, a ſyſtem ſo favorable to their ambition, and uſe every art to induce their ſubjects to embrace it. If the miniſters of this religion have ſince often derogated from their favorite principles, it is becauſe the theory influences the conduct of the miniſters of the Lord, only when it ſuits their temporal intereſts.

Chriſtianity boaſts of procuring men a happineſs unknown to preceding ages. It is true, the GREEKS knew not the *divine rights* of tyrants or uſurpers of the rights of their country. Under paganiſm, it never entered the heart of man to maintain, that it was againſt the will of heaven for a nation to defend themſelves againſt a ferocious beaſt, who ravaged them with inſolence. The religion of the Chriſtians contrived to ſcreen tyrants from danger, by laying down as a principle, that the people muſt renounce the legitimate defence of themſelves. Thus Chriſtian nations are deprived of the firſt law of nature, which allows man to reſiſt evil, and diſarm whoever is preparing to deſtroy him! If the miniſters of the church have often permitted the people to revolt for the intereſt of heaven, they have never permitted them to revolt againſt real evils or known violences.

From heaven came the chains, that were fixed on the minds of mortals. Why is the Mahometan every where a ſlave? Becauſe his prophet enſlaved him in the name of the Deity, as MOSES had

had before ſubdued the JEWS. In all parts of the earth, we ſee, that the firſt legiſlators were the firſt ſovereigns and prieſts of ſavages, to whom they gave laws.

Religion ſeems invented ſolely to exalt princes above their nations, and rivet the fetters of ſlavery. Are people too unhappy under the oppreſſion of earthly powers, prieſts are ready to ſilence them by threatening them with the anger of God; prieſts fix their eyes upon heaven, leſt they ſhould perceive the true cauſes of their misfortunes, and apply the remedies, which nature preſents.

147. By repeating to men, that the earth is not their true country, that the preſent life is only a paſſage, that they are not made to be happy in this world; that their ſovereigns hold their authority of God alone, and are accountable only to him for the abuſe of it, that it is not lawful to reſiſt them, &c. prieſts have eternized the miſgovernment of kings and the miſery of the people; the intereſts of nations have been baſely ſacrificed to their chiefs. The more we conſider the dogmas and principles of religion, the more we ſhall be convinced, that their ſole object is the advantage of tyrants and prieſts, without regard to that of ſocieties.

To maſk the impotence of its deaf gods, religion has perſuaded mortals, that iniquities always kindle the wrath of heaven. People impute to themſelves alone the diſaſters, that daily befal them. If nations ſometimes feel the ſtrokes of convulſed nature, their bad governments are but too often the immediate and permanent cauſes, whence proceed the continual calamities, they are forced to endure. Are not the ambition,

negligence,

negligence, vices and oppreſſions of kings and nobles, generally the cauſes of ſcarcity, beggary, wars, peſtilences, corrupt morals, and all the multiplied ſcourges, which deſolate the earth?

In fixing men's eyes continually upon heaven; in perſuading them, that all their misfortunes are effects of divine anger; in providing none but ineffectual means to put an end to their ſufferings, we might juſtly conclude that the only object of prieſts was to divert nations from the true ſources of their miſery, and thus render it eternal. The miniſters of religion conduct almoſt like thoſe indigent mothers, who, for want of bread, ſing their ſtarved children to ſleep, or give them play-things to divert their thoughts from afflicting hunger.

From infancy blinded by error, bound by the inviſible cords of opinion, overcome by panic terrors, their faculties blunted in the boſom of ignorance, how could mankind know the true cauſes of their wretchedneſs? They imagine that they can avert it by invoking the gods. Alas! do they not ſee, that they are ordered, in the name of theſe gods, to preſent their throats to the ſword of their mercileſs tyrants, in whom they might find the obvious cauſe of the evils, under which they groan, and for which they ceaſe not to implore, in vain, the aſſiſtance of heaven?

Ye credulous people! In your misfortunes, redouble your prayers, offerings and ſacrifices; ſurround your temples, butcher victims without number; faſt in ſack-cloth and aſhes; bathe yourſelves in your own tears; but above all, completely exhauſt yourſelves to enrich your gods; you will only enrich their prieſts; the

gods

gods of heaven will be propitious, only when the gods of earth ſhall acknowledge they are men, like you, and devote to your welfare the attention, that is due.

148. Negligent, ambitious and perverſe princes are the real cauſes of public misfortunes. Uſeleſs, unjuſt, reiterated wars depopulate the earth. All-graſping, deſpotic governments abſorb the benefits of nature. The rapacity of courts diſcourages agriculture, extinguiſhes induſtry, produces want, peſtilence and miſery. Heaven is neither cruel nor propitious to the prayers of the people; it is their proud chiefs, whoſe flinty hearts are generally proof againſt the tears of affliction.

It is deſtructive to ſound politics and the morals of princes, to perſuade them that they have God alone to fear, when they injure their ſubjects, or neglect their happineſs. Sovereigns! It is not the gods, but your people, that you offend, when you do evil. It is your people and yourſelves that you injure, when you govern unjuſtly.

In hiſtory, nothing is more common than to ſee religious tyrants; nothing more rare than to find equitable, vigilant, enlightened princes. A monarch may be pious, punctual in a ſervile diſcharge of the duties of his religion, ſubmiſſive and liberal to his prieſts, and at the ſame time be deſtitute of every virtue and talent neceſſary to govern. To princes, religion is only an inſtrument deſtined to ſtrengthen their tyranny.

By the excellent principles of religious morality, a tyrant who, during a long reign, has oppreſſed his ſubjects, wreſted from them the fruits of their labor, without pity ſacrificed them

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to his infatiable ambition ; a conqueror, who has uſurped the provinces of others, ſlaughtered whole nations, and who, during his whole life, has been a ſcourge to mankind, imagines his conſcience may reſt, when, to expiate ſo many crimes, he has wept at the feet of a prieſt, who generally has the baſe complaiſance to conſole and encourage a robber, whom the moſt hideous deſpair would too lightly puniſh for the miſery he has cauſed upon earth.

149. A ſovereign, ſincerely devout, is commonly dangerous to the ſtate. Credulity ſuppoſes a contracted mind ; devotion generally abſorbs the attention, which a prince ſhould pay to the government of his people. Obſequious to the ſuggeſtions of his prieſts, he becomes the ſport of their caprices, the favorer of their quarrels, the inſtrument and accomplice of their follies, which he imagines to be of the greateſt importance. Among the moſt fatal preſents, which religion has made the world, ought to be reckoned thoſe devout and zealous monarchs, who, under an idea of working for the welfare of their ſubjects, have made it a ſacred duty to torment, perſecute and deſtroy thoſe, who thought differently from themſelves. A bigot, at the head of an empire, is one of the greateſt ſcourges, which heaven in its fury can ſend upon earth. A ſingle fanatic or knaviſh prieſt, liſtened to by a credulous and powerful prince, ſuffices to put a ſtate in diſorder, and the world in combuſtion.

In almoſt all countries, prieſts and devotees are intruſted with forming the minds and hearts of young princes, deſtined to govern nations. What qualifications have inſtructors of this ſtamp ? By what intereſts can they be animated ?

Full

Full of prejudices themſelves, they will teach their pupil ſuperſtition, as moſt important and ſacred ; its chimerical duties, as moſt indiſpenſable; intolerance and perſecution, as the true foundation of his future authority ; they will endeavor to make him a party leader, a turbulent fanatic, a tyrant ; they will early ſtifle his reaſon, and forewarn him againſt the uſe of it ; they will prevent truth from reaching his ears ; they will exaſperate him againſt true talents, and prejudice him in favor of contemptible ones ; in fine, they will make him a weak devotee, who will have no idea either of juſtice or injuſtice, of true glory or greatneſs, and who will be deſtitute of the knowledge and virtues neceſſary to the government of a great nation. Such, in epitome, is the plan of the education of a child, deſtined one day to create the happineſs or miſery of millions of men !

150. Prieſts have ever ſhewn themſelves the friends of deſpotiſm, and the enemies of public liberty ;* their trade requires abiect and ſubmiſ-

ſive ſlaves, who have never the audacity to reaſon. In an abſolute government, they have only to gain an aſcendency over the mind of a weak and ſtupid prince, to become maſters of the nation. Inſtead of conducting the people to ſalvation, prieſts have always conducted them to ſervitude.

In conſideration of the ſupernatural titles, which religion has forged for the moſt deteſtable of princes, the latter have commonly united with prieſts, who, ſure of governing by opinion the ſovereign himſelf, have undertaken to bind the hands of the people and hold them under the yoke. But the tyrant, covered with the ſhield

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a fleet, which, in a few years, will incredibly multiply offices and expenſes,---in aggrandizing a ſingle city,---in enriching a ſwarm of mercenary ſpeculators, uſeleſs drones, who are almoſt the only perſons benefited by the funding ſyſtem, and whoſe *ponderous* wealth, by their own confeſſion, DISTURBS THEIR NIGHTLY REPOSE, while the poor ſoldier, who, by his blood, purchaſed the deliverance of his country, and without whoſe efforts this muſhroom race would

of religion, in vain flatters himſelf that he is ſecure from every ſtroke of fate ; opinion is a weak rampart againſt the deſpair of his people. Beſides, the prieſt is a friend of the tyrant only while he finds his account in tyranny ; he preaches ſedition, and demoliſhes the idol he has made, when he finds it no longer ſufficiently conformable to the will of heaven, which ſpeaks at his will, and always according to his intereſt.

It will be ſaid, that ſovereigns, knowing the advantage of religion to government, are truly intereſted in ſupporting it with all their ſtrength. If religious opinions are uſeful to tyrants, it is evident, they are uſeleſs to thoſe, who govern by the laws of reaſon and equity. Is there then advantage in exerciſing tyranny ? Are princes truly intereſted in being tyrants ? Does not tyranny deprive them of true power, the love of the people, and of all ſafety ? Ought not every reaſonable prince to perceive, that the deſpot is a madman, and an enemy to himſelf ? Muſt not every enlightened prince beware of flatterers, whoſe object is to ſoothe him to ſleep upon the brink of the precipice, they form beneath him ?

151. If ſacerdotal flatteries pervert princes and make them tyrants ; tyrants, on their part, neceſſarily corrupt both the great and the populace. Under an unjuſt ruler, void of goodneſs and virtue, who knows no law but his caprice, a nation muſt neceſſarily be depraved. Will this ruler wiſh to have, about his perſon, honeſt, enlightened and virtuous men ? No. He wants none but flatterers, approvers, imitators, ſlaves, baſe and ſervile ſouls, who gratify his inclinations. His court will propagate the contagion of vice among the lower ranks. All will gradually become corrupt-

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ed in a ſtate, whoſe chief is corrupt. It was long ſince ſaid, that *Princes ſeem to command others to do whatever they do themſelves.*

Religion, far from being a reſtraint upon ſovereigns, enables them to commit, without fear or remorſe, acts of licentiouſneſs as injurious to themſelves as to the nations, whom they govern. It is never with impunity, that we deceive men. Tell a ſovereign, that he is a god; he will very ſoon believe, that he owes nothing to any one. Provided he is feared, he will care very little about being loved; he will obſerve neither rules, relations with his ſubjects, nor duties towards them. Tell this prince, that he is *accountabte for his actions to God alone*, and he will ſoon act as if he were accountable to no one.

152. An enlightened ſovereign is he, who knows his true intereſts; who knows, they are connected with the intereſts of his nation; that a prince cannot be great, powerful, beloved or reſpected, while he commands only unhappy ſlaves; that equity, beneficence and vigilance will give him more real authority over his people, than the fabulous titles, deſcended from heaven. He will ſee, that religion is uſeful only to prieſts, that it is uſeleſs to ſociety, often troubles it, and that it is neceſſary to reſtrain it, in order to prevent its doing injury. Finally, he will perceive, that, to reign with glory, he muſt make good laws and inculcate virtue, and not found his power upon impoſtures and chimeras.

153. The miniſters of religion have taken great care to make of their God, a formidable, capricious, and fickle tyrant. Such a God was neceſſary to their variable intereſts. A God, who ſhould be juſt and good, without mixture of

caprice

caprice or perverſity; a God, who had conſtantly the qualities of an honeſt man, or kind ſovereign, would by no means ſuit his miniſters. It is uſeful to prieſts, that men tremble before their God, in order that they may apply to them to obtain relief from their fears.

No man is a hero for his valet de chambre. It is not ſurpriſing, that a God, dreſſed by his prieſts in a manner terrible to others, rarely appears ſo to themſelves, or has but very little influence upon their conduct. Conſequently, in every country, their conduct is very uniform. Under pretext of the glory of their God, they every where devour nations, degrade the mind, diſcourage induſtry, and ſow diſcord. Ambition and avarice have at all times been the ruling paſſions of the prieſthood. The prieſt every where riſes ſuperior to ſovereigns and laws; we ſee him every where occupied with the intereſts of his pride, luſt, and deſpotic, revengeful humor. In the room of uſeful and ſocial virtues, he every where ſubſtitutes expiations, ſacrifices, ceremonies, myſterious practices, in a word, inventions lucrative to himſelf and ruinous to others.

The mind is confounded and reaſon amazed upon viewing the ridiculous cuſtoms and pitiful means, which the miniſters of the gods have invented in every country to purify ſouls, and render heaven favorable to nations. Here they cut off part a child's prepuce, to ſecure for him divine benevolence; there, they pour water upon his head, to cleanſe him of crimes, which he could not as yet have committed. In one place, they command him to plunge into a river, whoſe waters have the power of waſhing away all ſtains; in another, he is forbidden to eat certain food,

the

the uſe of which will not fail to excite the celeſtial wrath; in other countries, they enjoin upon ſinful man to come periodically and confeſs his faults to a prieſt, who is often a greater ſinner than himſelf, &c. &c.

154. What ſhould we ſay of a ſet of empirics, who, reſorting every day to a public place, ſhould extol the goodneſs of their remedies, and vend them as infallible, while they themſelves were full of the infirmities, they pretend to cure? Should we have much confidence in the receipts of theſe quacks, though they ſtun us with crying, *take our remedies, their effects are infallible; they cure every body, except us.* What ſhould we afterwards think, ſhould thoſe quacks ſpend their lives in complaining, that their remedies never produce the deſired effect upon the ſick, who take them? In fine, what idea ſhould we form of the ſtupidity of the vulgar, who, notwithſtanding theſe confeſſions, ceaſe not to pay dearly for remedies, the inefficacy of which every thing tends to prove? Prieſts reſemble thoſe alchymiſts, who boldly tell us, they have the ſecret of making gold, while they have ſcarcely clothes to cover their nakedneſs.

The miniſters of religion inceſſantly declaim againſt the corruption of the age, and loudly complain of the little influence of their leſſons, while at the ſame time they aſſure us, that religion is the *univerſal remedy*, the true *panacea* againſt the wickedneſs of mankind. Theſe prieſts are very ſick themſelves, yet men continue to frequent their ſhops, and to have faith in their divine antidotes, which, by their own confeſſion, never effect a cure!

155. Religion,

155. Religion, eſpecially with the moderns, by teaching morality, has totally obſcured its principles. It has rendered men unſociable by duty, and forced them to be inhuman to every one, who thought differently from themſelves. Theological diſputes, equally unintelligible to each of the enraged parties, have ſhaken empires, cauſed revolutions, been fatal to ſovereigns, and deſolated all EUROPE. Theſe contemptible quarrels have not been extinguiſhed in rivers of blood. Since the extinction of paganiſm, people have made it a religious principle to become outrageous, whenever any opinion is advanced, which their prieſts think contrary to *ſound doctrine*. The ſectaries of a religion, which preaches, in appearance, nothing but charity, concord and peace, have proved themſelves more ferocious than cannibals or ſavages, whenever their divines excited them to deſtroy their brethren. There is no crime, which men have not committed under the idea of pleaſing the Divinity or appeaſing his wrath.

The idea of a terrible God, whom we paint to ourſelves as a deſpot, muſt neceſſarily render his ſubjects wicked. Fear makes only ſlaves, and ſlaves are cowardly, baſe, cruel, and think every thing lawful, in order to gain the favor or eſcape the chaſtiſements of the maſter, whom they fear. Liberty of thinking alone can give men humanity and greatneſs of ſoul. The notion of a tyrant-god tends only to make them abject, moroſe, quarrelſome, intolerant ſlaves.

Every religion, which ſuppoſes a God eaſily provoked, jealous, revengeful, punctilious about his rights or etiquette ;—a God ſmall enough to be hurt by the opinions, which men can form of him ;—

him ;—a God unjuſt enough to require, that we have uniform notions of his conduct ; ſuch a religion neceſſarily becomes reſtleſs, unſociable and ſanguinary ; the worſhippers of ſuch a God would never think, that they could, without offence, forbear hating and even deſtroying every one, who is pointed out to them, as an adverſary of this God ; they would think, that it would be to betray the cauſe of their celeſtial Monarch, to live in friendly intercourſe with rebellious fellow-citizens. To love what God hates, is it not to expoſe one's ſelf to his implacable hatred ?

Infamous perſecutors, and ye devout men-eaters ! Will you never diſcern the folly and injuſtice of your intolerant diſpoſition ? Do you not ſee, that man is no more maſter of his religious opinions, his belief or unbelief, than of the language, which he learns from infancy, and which he cannot change ? To tell a man to think like you, is it not to require a foreigner to ſpeak your language ? To puniſh a man for his errors, is it not to puniſh him for having been educated differently from you ? If I am an unbeliever, is it poſſible for me to baniſh from my mind the reaſons, that have ſhaken my faith ? If your God gives men leave to be damned, why do you meddle ? Are you then more prudent and wiſe, than this God, whoſe rights you would avenge ?

156. There is no devotee, who does not, according to his temperament, hate, deſpiſe, or pity the adherents of a ſect, different from his own. The *eſtabliſhed* religion, which is always that of the ſovereign and the armies, always makes its ſuperiority felt in a very cruel and injurious manner by the weaker ſects. As yet there is no true toleration upon earth ; men every where adore a

jealous

jealous God, of whom each nation believes itſelf the friend, to the excluſion of all others.

Every people boaſts of adoring alone the true God, the univerſal God, the Sovereign of all nature. But when we come to examine this Monarch of the world, we find that every ſociety, ſect, party, or religious cabal, makes of this ſo powerful God only a pitiful ſovereign, whoſe care and goodneſs extend only to a ſmall number of his ſubjects, who pretend to have alone the happineſs to enjoy his favors, and that he is not at all concerned about the fate of others.

The founders of religions, and the prieſts who ſupport them, evidently propoſed to ſeparate the nations, whom they taught, from others; they wiſhed to ſeparate their own flock by diſtinguiſhing marks; they gave their followers gods, who, modes of worſhip, dogmas and ceremonies apart, were hoſtile to other gods; above all, they perſuaded them, that the religion of others was impious and abominable. By this unworthy artifice, theſe ambitious knaves have eſtabliſhed their uſurpation over the minds of their followers, rendered them unſociable, and made them regard every one, as proſcribed, who had not the ſame mode of worſhip and the ſame ideas. Thus it is, that religion has ſhut up the heart and for ever baniſhed from it the affection, that man ought to have for his fellow-creature. Sociability, indulgence, humanity, thoſe firſt virtues of all morality, are totally incompatible with religious prejudices.

157. Every national religion is calculated to make man vain, unſociable and wicked; the firſt ſtep towards humanity is to permit every one peaceably to embrace the mode of worſhip and

opinions, which he judges to be right. But this conduct cannot be pleaſing to the miniſters of religion, who wiſh to have the right of tyranniſing over men even in their thoughts.

Blind and bigoted princes! You hate, perſecute and order to execution, heretics, becauſe you are told, that theſe wretches diſpleaſe God. But do you not ſay, that your God is full of goodneſs? How then can you expect to pleaſe him by acts of barbarity, which he muſt neceſſarily diſapprove? Beſides, who has informed you, that their opinions diſpleaſe your God? Your prieſts. But, who aſſures you, that your prieſts are not themſelves deceived or wiſh to deceive you? The ſame prieſts. Princes! It is then upon the hazardous word of your prieſts, that you commit the moſt atrocious crimes, under the idea of pleaſing the Divinity!

158. *Man*, ſays PASCAL, *never does evil ſo fully and cheerfully, as when from a falſe principle of conſcience.** Nothing is more dangerous than a religion, which gives up the reins to the ferocity of the multitude, and juſtifies their blackeſt crimes. They will ſet no bounds to their wickedneſs, when they think it authorized by their God, in whoſe cauſe they are told, every action is legitimate. Is religion in danger? the moſt civilized people immediately become true ſavages, and think every thing lawful. The more cruel they are, the more agreeable they ſuppoſe they are to their God, whoſe cauſe they imagine cannot be ſupported with too much warmth.

All religions have authorized innumerable crimes. The JEWS, intoxicated with the promiſes

* Vide Thoughts of PASCAL. XXXVIII.

ſes of their God, arrogated the right of exterminating whole nations. Empowered by the oracles of their God, the ROMANS, like true robbers, conquered and ravaged the world. The ARABIANS, encouraged by their divine prophet, carried fire and ſword among the Chriſtians and idolaters. The Chriſtians, under pretext of extending their holy religion, have often deluged both hemiſpheres in blood.

In all events favorable to their own intereſt, which they always call the *cauſe of God*, prieſts ſhew us the *finger of God*. According to theſe principles, the devout have the happineſs to ſee the *finger of God* in revolts, revolutions, maſſacres, regicides, crimes, proſtitutions, infamies; and, if theſe things contribute ever ſo little to the triumph of religion, we are told, that *God uſes all ſorts of means to attain his ends*. Is any thing more capable of effacing every idea of morality from the minds of men, than to inform them, that their God, ſo powerful and perfect, is often forced to countenance the commiſſion of criminal actions to accompliſh his deſigns?

159. No ſooner do we complain of the extravagances and evils, that religion has ſo often cauſed upon the earth, than we are aſſured, that theſe exceſſes are not owing to religion; but that they are the ſad effects of the paſſions of men. But I would aſk, what has let looſe theſe paſſions? It is evidently religion; it is zeal, that renders men inhuman, and ſerves to conceal the greateſt infamy. Do not theſe diſorders then prove, that religion, far from reſtraining the paſſions of men, only covers them with a veil, which ſanctifies them, and that nothing would be more uſeful, than to tear off this ſacred veil, of which

men often make ſuch a terrible uſe? What horrors would be baniſhed from ſociety, if the wicked were deprived of ſo plauſible a pretext to diſturb it!

Inſtead of angels of peace among men, prieſts have been demons of diſcord. They have alleged their *conſcience*, and pretended to have received from heaven the right of being quarrelſome, turbulent and rebellious. Do not the miniſters of the Lord think themſelves aggrieved, and pretend that the divine Majeſty is offended, whenever ſovereigns have the temerity to check their ravages? Prieſts reſemble that ſpiteful woman, who cried *fire! murder! aſſaſſination!* while her huſband held her hands to prevent her from ſtriking himſelf.

160. Notwithſtanding the bloody tragedies, which religion often acts, it is inſiſted, that, without religion, there can be no morality. If we judge theological opinions by their effects, we may confidently aſſert, that all morality is perfectly incompatible with the religious opinions of men.

Imitate God, exclaims the devotee. But, what would be our morality, ſhould we imitate this God! What God then muſt we imitate? The God of the deiſt? But even this God cannot ſerve us as a very conſtant model of goodneſs. If he is the author of all things, he is the author both of good and evil; if he is the author of order, he is alſo the author of diſorder, which could not take place without his permiſſion. If he produces, he deſtroys; if he gives life, he takes it away; if he grants abundance, riches, proſperity and peace, he permits or ſends ſcarcity, poverty, calamities and wars. How can we receive as a

model

model of permanent beneficence, the God of deiſm or natural religion, whoſe favorable diſpoſitions are every inſtant contradicted by the effects, we behold? Morality muſt have a baſis leſs tottering than the example of a God, whoſe conduct varies, and who cannot be called good, unleſs we obſtinately ſhut our eyes againſt the evil, he does or permits in this world.

Shall we imitate the *beneficent*, the *mighty Jupiter* of heathen antiquity? To imitate ſuch a god, is to admit as a model, a rebellious ſon, who raviſhes the throne from his father. It is to imitate a debauchee, an adulterer, one guilty of inceſt, at whoſe conduct every reaſonable mortal would bluſh. What would have been the condition of men under paganiſm, had they imagined, like PLATO, that virtue conſiſted in imitating the gods!

Muſt we imitate the God of the JEWS! Shall we find in *Jehovah* a model for our conduct? This is a truly ſavage god, made for a ſtupid, cruel and immoral people; he is always in a rage, breathes nothing but vengeance, knows not pity, commands carnage, theft and unſociability; in a word, the conduct of this god cannot ſerve as a model to that of an honeſt man, and can be imitated only by a chief of robbers.

Shall we then imitate the *Jeſus* of the Chriſtians? Does this God, who died to appeaſe the implacable fury of his father, furniſh us an example, which men ought to follow? Alas! we ſhall ſee in him only a God, or rather a fanatic, a miſanthrope, who, himſelf plunged in wretchedneſs and preaching to wretches, will adviſe them to be poor, to combat and ſtifle nature, hate pleaſure, ſeek grief, and deteſt themſelves; he will tell them to leave father, mother, relations,

tions, friends, &c. to follow him. Fine morality! It is, undoubtedly, admirable; it muſt be divine, for it is impracticable to men. But is not ſuch ſublime morality calculated to render virtue odious? According to the ſo much boaſted morality of the *man-God* of the chriſtians, his diſciples in this world are, like *Tantalus*, tormented with a burning thirſt, which they are not allowed to allay. Does not ſuch morality give us a wonderful idea of the author of nature? If, as we are aſſured, he has created all things for his creatures, by what ſtrange whim does he forbid them the uſe of the goods he has created for them? Is pleaſure then, which man continually deſires, only a ſnare, which God has maliciouſly laid to ſurpriſe his weakneſs?

161. The followers of CHRIST would have us regard, as a miracle, the eſtabliſhment of their religion, which is totally repugnant to nature, oppoſite to all the propenſities of the heart, an enemy of ſenſual pleaſures. But the auſterity of a doctrine renders it the more marvellous in the eyes of the vulgar. The ſame diſpoſition, which reſpects inconceivable myſteries, as divine and ſupernatural, admires as divine and ſupernatural, a morality, that is impracticable and ſuperior to the powers of man.

To admire a ſyſtem of morality and put it in practice, are two very different things. All Chriſtians admire and extol the morality of the goſpel; but it is practiſed only by a very ſmall number of ſaints; it is admirable indeed for people, who excuſe themſelves from imitating their conduct under pretext, that they are deficient in ſtrength or grace.

The whole world is more or leſs infected with a religious morality, founded upon the opinion,

that,

that, to pleaſe the Divinity, it is abſolutely neceſſary to render ourſelves unhappy upon earth. In all parts of our globe, we ſee penitents, ſolitaries, *faquirs* and fanatics, who ſeem to have profoundly ſtudied the means of tormenting themſelves in honor of a being, whoſe goodneſs all agree in celebrating. Religion, by its eſſence, is an enemy to the joy and happineſs of men. *Bleſſed are the poor; bleſſed are they, who weep; bleſſed are they, who ſuffer;* miſery to thoſe, who are in abundance and joy. Such are the rare diſcoveries, announced by Chriſtianity!

162. What is a ſaint? A man, who prays, faſts, torments himſelf, ſhuns the world; who, like an owl, delights only in ſolitude, abſtains from all pleaſure, and ſeems frighted at every object, which, for a moment, may divert him from his fanatic meditations. Is this virtue? Is a being of this caſt kind to himſelf, or uſeful to others? Would not ſociety be diſſolved, and man return to a ſavage ſtate, ſhould every one be fool enough to wiſh to be a ſaint?

It is evident, that the literal and rigorous practice of the divine morality of the Chriſtians would prove the infallible ruin of nations. A Chriſtian, aiming at perfection, ought to free his mind from whatever can divert it from heaven, his true country; upon earth, he ſees nothing but temptations, ſnares, and rocks of perdition. He muſt fear ſcience, as hurtful to faith; he muſt avoid induſtry, as a mean of obtaining riches, too fatal to ſalvation; he muſt renounce offices and honours, as capable of exciting his pride, and calling off his attention from the care of his ſoul. In a word, the ſublime morality of CHRIST,

were it practicable, would break all the bonds of ſociety.

A ſaint is as uſeleſs in ſociety, as a ſaint in the deſert; his humor is moroſe, diſcontented and often turbulent; his zeal ſometimes obliges him in conſcience to trouble his ſociety by opinions or dreams, which his vanity makes him conſider as inſpirations from on high. The annals of every religion are full of reſtleſs ſaints, intractable ſaints, and ſeditious ſaints, who have become famous by the ravages, which, *for the greateſt glory of God*, they have committed. If ſaints, who live in retirement, are uſeleſs, thoſe who live in the world, are often very dangerous.

The vanity of acting a part, and the deſire of appearing illuſtrious in the eyes of the ſhort-ſighted vulgar by a ſingular conduct, commonly conſtitute the diſtinguiſhing character of great ſaints. Pride perſuades them, that they are extraordinary men, far above human nature, beings much more perfect than others, favorites, whom God regards with much more complaiſance than the reſt of mortals. Humility, in a ſaint, is commonly only a more refined pride, than that of the generality of men. Nothing but the moſt ridiculous vanity can induce man to wage continual war againſt his own nature.

163. A morality, which contradicts the nature of man, is not made for man. But, ſay you, the nature of man is depraved. In what conſiſts this pretended depravity? In having paſſions? But, are not paſſions eſſential to man? Is he not obliged to ſeek, deſire, and love what is, or what he thinks is conducive to his happineſs? Is he not forced to fear and avoid what he judges diſagreeable or fatal to him? Kindle his paſſions

for

for uſeful objects; connect his welfare with thoſe objects; divert him, by ſenſible and known motives, from what may injure himſelf or others, and you will make him a reaſonable and virtuous being. A man without paſſions would be equally indifferent to vice and virtue.

Sacred doctors! you are always repeating, that the nature of man is perverted; you exclaim, that *all fleſh has corrupted its way*; that all the propenſities of nature are inordinate. In this caſe, you accuſe your God, who was either unable, or unwilling that this nature ſhould preſerve its primitive perfection. If this nature is corrupted, why has not God retrieved it? The Chriſtian immediately aſſures me, that human nature is retrieved; that the death of his God has reſtored his integrity. How then, I would aſk, do you pretend that human nature, notwithſtanding the death of a God, is ſtill depraved? Is thenthe death of your God wholly fruitleſs? What becomes of his omnipotence and his victory over the devil, if it is true that the devil ſtill preſerves the empire, which, according to you, he has always exerciſed in the world?

According to Chriſtian theology, death is the *wages of ſin*. This opinion is conformable to that of ſome negro and ſavage nations, who imagine that the death of a man is always the ſupernatural effect of the anger of the gods. Chriſtians firmly believe, that Chriſt has delivered them from ſin, though they ſee, that, in their religion, as in others, man is ſubject to death. To ſay that Jeſus Chriſt has delivered us from ſin, is it not to ſay, that a judge has pardoned a criminal, while we ſee that he orders him to execution?

164. If,

164. If, ſhutting our eyes upon whatever paſſes in the world, we would credit the partiſans of the Chriſtian religion, we ſhould believe, that the coming of their divine Saviour produced the moſt wonderful and complete reform in the manners of nations. 'The Meſſiah,' according to PASCAL, 'was alone to produce a 'great, elect, holy and choſen people; to lead, ſup-'port and introduce them into the abode of 'peace and holineſs; to render them holy before 'God, make them the temple of God, ſave 'them from the anger of God, deliver them 'from the dominion of ſin, give them laws, 'engrave theſe laws upon their hearts, offer him-'ſelf to God for them, break the head of the 'devil, &c.'* This great man forgot to point out the people, upon whom his divine Meſſiah produced the miraculous effects, of which he ſo emphatically ſpeaks; it ſeems, they are not as yet in exiſtence.

If we ſlightly examine the morals of Chriſtian nations, and liſten to the clamors of their prieſts, we ſhall be forced to conclude, that Jeſus Chriſt, their God, preached and died in vain; his omnipotent will ſtill finds in men, a reſiſtance, over which he cannot, or will not triumph. The morality of this divine Teacher, which his diſciples ſo much admire and ſo little practiſe, is followed, in a whole age, only by half a dozen obſcure ſaints, fanatics, and ignorant monks, who alone will have the glory of ſhining in the celeſtial court; all the reſt of mortals, though redeemed by the blood of this God, will be the prey of eternal flames.

165. When

* Vide Thoughts of PASCAL. XV.

165. When a man is ſtrongly inclined to ſin, he little thinks of his God. Nay more, whatever crimes he has committed, he always flatters himſelf, that this God will ſoften, in his favor, the rigor of his decrees. No mortal ſeriouſly believes, that his conduct can damn him. Though he fears a terrible God, who often makes him tremble; yet, whenever he is ſtrongly tempted, he yields, and afterwards ſees only the God of *mercies*, the idea of whom calms his apprehenſions. Does he commit evil? he hopes, he ſhall have time to reform, and promiſes to repent at a future day.

In religious pharmacy, there are infallible receipts to quiet conſciences; prieſts, in every country, poſſeſs ſovereign ſecrets to diſarm the anger of heaven. Yet, if it is true that the Deity is appeaſed by prayers, offerings, ſacrifices and penances, it can no longer be ſaid, that religion is a check to the irregularities of men; they will firſt ſin, and then ſeek the means to appeaſe God. Every religion, which expiates and promiſes the remiſſion of crimes, if it reſtrains ſome, encourages the majority to the commiſſion of evil.

Notwithſtanding his immutability, God, in every religion in the world, is a true *Proteus*. His prieſts repreſent him at one time armed with ſeverity, at another full of clemency and mildneſs; ſometimes cruel and mercileſs; and ſometimes eaſily melted by the ſorrow and tears of ſinners. Conſequently, men ſee the Divinity only on the ſide moſt conformable to their preſent intereſts. A God, always angry, would diſcourage or drive his worſhippers to deſpair. Men muſt have a God, who is irritable and placable. If his anger frightens ſome timorous ſouls, his

clemency

clemency encourages the reſolute wicked, who depend moreover upon recurring, ſooner or later, to the means of accommodation. If the judgments of God terrify ſome fainthearted bigots, who by conſtitution and habit are not prone to evil; *the treaſures of divine mercy* encourage the greateſt criminals, who have reaſon to hope, they ſhall participate therein equally with others.

166. Moſt men ſeldom think of God, or at leaſt, regard him with little ſerious attention. The idea of him is ſo unfixed and afflicting, that it can long arreſt the imagination only of ſome ſad and melancholy dotards, who are not the majority of the inhabitants of this world. The vulgar have no conception of him; their weak brains are confuſed, whenever they think of him. The man of buſineſs thinks only of his buſineſs; the courtier of his intrigues; men of faſhion, women and young people of their pleaſures; diſſipation ſoon effaces in them all the fatiguing notions of religion. The ambitious, the miſer and the debauchee carefully avoid ſpeculations too feeble to counterbalance their various paſſions.

Who is awed by the idea of God? A few men, who are enfeebled, moroſe, and diſguſted with the world; a few, in whom the paſſions are already deadened by age, infirmity, or the ſtrokes of fortune. Religion is a check to thoſe alone, whoſe temperament or circumſtances have already brought them to reaſon. The fear of God hinders from ſin thoſe only, whoſe inclination is not very ſtrong, or who are no longer able to commit it.

To tell men, that the Deity puniſhes crimes in this world, is to advance an aſſertion, which ex-

perience

perience every moment contradicts. The worſt of men are commonly the arbiters of the world, and thoſe, whom fortune loads with her favors. To refer us to another life in order to convince us of the judgments of God, is to refer us to conjectures in order to deſtroy facts, which cannot be doubted.

167. Nobody thinks of the future life, when he is ſtrongly ſmitten with the objects, he finds here below. In the eyes of a paſſionate lover, the preſence of his miſtreſs extinguiſhes the flames of hell, and her charms efface all the pleaſures of paradiſe. Woman! you leave, ſay you, your lover for your God. This is becauſe your lover is no longer the ſame in your eyes, or becauſe he leaves you; and it is neceſſary to fill up the vacancy, that is made in your heart.

Nothing is more common, than to ſee ambitious, perverſe, corrupt and immoral men, who have ſome religion, and ſometimes appear even zealous for its intereſt; if they do not practiſe it at preſent, they hope to do it, at a future day; they lay it up, as a remedy, which will be neceſſary to tranquilize the conſcience for the evil they ſtill intend to commit. Beſides, the party of devotees and prieſts being very numerous, active and powerful, it is not aſtoniſhing, that rogues and knaves ſeek its ſupport to attain their ends. It will undoubtedly be ſaid, that many honeſt people are ſincerely religious, and that without profit; but, is uprightneſs of heart always accompanied with knowledge?

It is urged, that many learned men, many men of genius have been ſtrongly attached to religion. This proves, that men of genius may have prejudices, be puſillanimous, and have an

imagination.

imagination, which misleads and prevents them from examining subjects coolly. PASCAL proves nothing in favor of religion, unless that a man of genius may be foolish, and is but a child, when he is weak enough to listen to his prejudices. PASCAL himself tells us, that *the mind may be strong and contracted, enlarged and weak.** He previously observes, that *a man may have a sound mind, and not understand every subject equally well; for there are some, who, having a sound judgment in a certain order of things, are bewildered in others.*

168. What is virtue according to theology? *It is*, we are told, *the conformity of the actions of man to the will of God.* But, what is God? A being, of whom nobody has the least conception, and whom every one consequently modifies in his own way. What is the will of God? It is what men, who have seen God, or whom God has inspired, have declared to be the will of God. Who are those, who have seen God? They are either fanatics, rogues or ambitious men, whom we cannot readily believe upon their word.

To found morality upon a God, whom every man paints to himself differently, composes in his way, and arranges according to his own temperament and interest, is evidently to found morality upon the caprice and imagination of men; it is to found it upon the whims of a sect, a faction, a party, who will believe they have the advantage to adore a true God, to the exclusion of all others.

To establish morality or the duties of man upon the divine will, is to found it upon the will, reveries and interests of those, who make God speak,

* See Thoughts of PASCAL, XXXI.

ſpeak, without ever fearing, that he will contradict them. In every religion, prieſts alone have a right to decide what is pleaſing or diſpleaſing to their God; we are certain, they will always decide, that it is what pleaſes or diſpleaſes themſelves.

The dogmas, ceremonies, morality and virtues, preſcribed by every religion in the world, are viſibly calculated only to extend the power or augment the emoluments of the founders and miniſters of thoſe religions. The dogmas are obſcure, inconceivable, frightful, and therefore well calculated to bewilder the imagination, and render the vulgar more obſequious to the will of thoſe, who wiſh to domineer over them. The ceremonies and practices procure the prieſts riches or reſpect. Religious morality and virtues conſiſt in a ſubmiſſive faith, which prohibits the exerciſe of reaſon, in a devout humility, which inſures prieſts the ſubmiſſion of their ſlaves; in an ardent zeal, when religion, that is, when the intereſt of theſe prieſts is in danger. The only object of all religious virtues is evidently the advantage of the miniſters of religion.

169. When we reproach theologians with the barrenneſs of their *divine* virtues, they emphatically extol *charity*, that tender love of one's neighbor, which chriſtianity makes an eſſential duty of its diſciples. But alas! what becomes of this pretended charity, when we examine the conduct of the miniſters of the Lord? Aſk them whether we muſt love or do good to our neighbor if he be impious, a heretic, an infidel, that is, if he do not think like them; aſk them whether we muſt tolerate opinions contrary to thoſe of the

religion,

religion, they profeſs; aſk them whether the ſovereign can ſhow indulgence to thoſe, who are in error? Their charity inſtantly diſappears, and the eſtabliſhed clergy will tell you, that *the prince bears the ſword only to ſupport the cauſe of the Moſt High;* that through love for our neighbor, we muſt perſecute, impriſon, exile, and burn him. You will find no toleration except among a few prieſts, perſecuted themſelves, who will lay aſide chriſtian charity the inſtant they have power to perſecute in their turn.

The chriſtian religion, in its origin preached by beggars and miſerable men under the name of *charity*, ſtrongly recommends alms. The religion of Mahomet alſo enjoins it as an indiſpenſable duty. Nothing undoubtedly is more conformable to humanity, than to ſuccour the unfortunate, to clothe the naked, to extend the hand of beneficence to every one in diſtreſs. But would it not be more humane and charitable to prevent the increaſe of miſery and poverty? If religion, inſtead of deifying princes, had taught them to reſpect the property of their ſubjects, to be juſt, to exerciſe only their lawful rights, we ſhould not be ſhocked by the ſight of ſuch a multitude of beggars in their dominions. A rapacious, unjuſt, tyrannical government multiplies miſery; heavy taxes produce diſcouragement, ſloth and poverty, which in their turn beget robberies, aſſaſſinations and crimes of every deſcription. Had ſovereigns more humanity, charity and equity, their dominions would not be peopled by ſo many wretches, that it would be impoſſible to alleviate their miſery.

Chriſtian and Mahometan ſtates are full of large hoſpitals, richly endowed, in which is admired

mired the pious charity of the kings and ſultans, who erected them. Would it not have been more humane to govern the people juſtly, to render them happy, excite and favor induſtry and commerce, and let them enjoy in ſafety the fruit of their labors, than to cruſh them under a deſpotic yoke, impoveriſh them by fooliſh wars, and reduce them to beggary, in order to ſatisfy an unbridled luxury, and then build ſplendid monuments, which can contain but a very ſmall portion of thoſe, whom they have rendered miſerable? Religion, by its virtues, has only deluded men; inſtead of preventing evils, it always applies ineffectual remedies.

The miniſters of heaven have ever known how to profit by the calamities of others. Public miſery was, if I may uſe the expreſſion, their element. They have every where become adminiſtrators of the property of the poor, diſtributers of alms, depoſitaries of charitable donations; and thereby they have at all times extended and ſupported their power over the unhappy, who generally compoſe the moſt numerous, reſtleſs, and ſeditious part of ſociety. Thus the greateſt evils turn to the profit of the miniſters of the Lord.

Chriſtian prieſts tell us, that the property, they poſſeſs, is the property of the poor, and that it is therefore ſacred. Conſequently, ſovereigns and people have eagerly accumulated upon them lands, revenues, treaſures. Under color of charity, our ſpiritual guides have become extremely opulent, and, in the face of impoveriſhed nations, enjoy wealth, which was deſtined ſolely for the unfortunate; the latter, far from murmuring, applaud a pious generoſity, which enriches the

church, but rarely contributes to the relief of the poor.

According to the principles of chriſtianity, poverty itſelf is a virtue; indeed, it is the virtue, which ſovereigns and prieſts oblige their ſlaves the moſt rigorouſly to obſerve. With this idea, many pious chriſtians of their own accord have renounced the periſhable riches of the earth, diſtributed their patrimony among the poor, and retired into deſerts, there to live in voluntary indigence. But this enthuſiaſm, this ſupernatural taſte for miſery was ſoon forced to yield to nature. The ſucceſſors of theſe volunteers in poverty ſold to devout people their prayers and powerful interceſſions with the divinty; they became rich and powerful. Thus monks and ſolitaries lived in indolence, and under color of charity, impudently devoured the ſubſtance of the poor.

The ſpecies of poverty, moſt eſteemed by religion, is *poverty of mind*. The fundamental virtue of all religion, that is, the moſt uſeful to its miniſters, is *faith*. It conſiſts in unbounded credulity, which admits without enquiry whatever the interpreters of the Deity, are intereſted in making men believe. By the aid of this wonderful virtue, prieſts became the arbiters of right and wrong, of good and evil; they could eaſily cauſe the commiſſion of crimes to advance their intereſt. Implicit faith has been the ſource of the greateſt outrages, that have been committed upon earth.

170. He, who firſt taught nations, that, when we wrong men, we muſt aſk pardon of God, appeaſe him by preſents, and offer him ſacrifices, evidently deſtroyed the true principles of morality. According to ſuch ideas, men imagine that

they

they may obtain of the king of heaven, as of kings of the earth, permiſſion to be unjuſt and wicked, or at leaſt, pardon for the evil they may commit.

Morality is founded upon the relations, wants, and conſtant intereſts of the inhabitants of the earth; the relations, which ſubſiſt between God and men are either perfectly unknown, or imaginary. Religion, by aſſociating God with men, has wiſely weakened or deſtroyed the bonds, which unite them. Mortals imagine, they may injure one another with impunity, by making ſuitable ſatisfaction to the almighty being, who is ſuppoſed to have the right of remitting all offences committed againſt his creatures.

Is any thing better calculated to encourage, or harden the wicked in crimes, than to perſuade them, that there exiſts an inviſible being, who has a right to forgive them the acts of injuſtice, rapine, perfidy and outrage, that they commit againſt ſociety? Encouraged by theſe deſtructive ideas, the moſt perverſe men perpetrate the moſt horrid crimes, and believe they make reparation by imploring divine mercy; their conſcience is at reſt, when a prieſt aſſures them that heaven is diſarmed by a ſincere repentance, very uſeleſs to the world. The prieſt conſoles them in the name of the Deity, if they conſent, as a reparation of their faults, to ſhare with his miniſters the fruits of their fraud and robberies.

A morality, connected with religion, is neceſſarily ſubordinate to it. In the mind of a devout man, God muſt be regarded more than his creatures; it is better to obey him, than men. The intereſts of the celeſtial monarch muſt prevail over thoſe of weak mortals. But the intereſts of

heaven are obviouſly thoſe of its miniſters; whence it evidently follows, that in every religion, prieſts, under pretext of the intereſts of heaven or the glory of God, can diſpenſe with the duties of human morality, when they claſh with the duties, which God has a right to impoſe. Beſides, muſt not he, who has power to pardon crimes, have a right to command the commiſſion of crimes?

171. It is declared with much emphaſis, that without a God there would be no *moral obligation*; that men and ſovereigns themſelves want a legiſlator powerful enough to oblige them. Moral obligation ſuppoſes a law; but this law ariſes from the eternal and neceſſary relations of things; relations, which have nothing common with the exiſtence of a God. The rules of men's conduct flow from their own nature, which they are able to know, and not from the divine nature, of which they have no idea. Theſe rules oblige us; that is, we render ourſelves eſtimable or contemptible, amiable or deteſtable, worthy of reward or puniſhment, happy or unhappy, according as we conform to, or deviate from theſe rules. The law, which obliges man not to hurt himſelf, is founded upon the nature of a ſenſible being, who, in whatever way he came into this world, or whatever may be his fate in a future one, is forced by his actual eſſence to ſeek good and ſhun evil, to love pleaſure and fear pain. The law, which obliges man not to injure, and even to do good to others, is founded upon the nature of ſenſible beings, living in ſociety, whoſe eſſence compels them to deſpiſe thoſe, who are uſeleſs, and to deteſt thoſe, who oppoſe their felicity.

Whether

Whether there exiſts a God, or not ; whether this God has ſpoken, or not, the moral duties of men will be always the ſame, ſo long as they are ſenſible beings. Have men then need of a God, whom they know not, of an inviſible legiſlator, of a myſterious religion and chimerical fears, in order to learn that every exceſs evidently tends to deſtroy them, that to preſerve health, they muſt be temperate, that to gain the love of others, it is neceſſary to do them good, that to do them evil is a ſure mean to incur their vengeance and hatred ?

Before the law there was no ſin. Nothing is more falſe than this maxim. It ſuffices that man is what he is, or that he is a ſenſible being, in order to diſtinguiſh what gives him pleaſure or diſpleaſure. It ſuffices that one man knows, that another man is a ſenſible being, like himſelf, to perceive what is uſeful or hurtful to him. It ſuffices that man needs his fellow-creature, in order to know, that he muſt fear to excite in him ſentiments unfavorable to himſelf. Thus the feeling and thinking being has only to feel and think, in order to diſcover what he muſt do for himſelf and others. I feel, and another feels like me ; this is the foundation of all morality.

172. We can judge of the goodneſs of a ſyſtem of morality, only by its conformity to the nature of man. By this compariſon, we have a right to reject it, if contrary to the welfare of our ſpecies. Whoever has ſeriouſly meditated religion and its ſupernatural morality ; whoever has carefully weighed their advantages and diſadvantages, will be fully convinced, that both are injurious to the intereſts of man, or directly oppoſite to his nature.

'To arms! the cauſe of your God is at ſtake! 'Heaven is outraged! The faith is in danger! 'Impiety! blaſphemy! hereſy!' The magical power of theſe formidable words, by which the people never underſtand any thing, have at all times enabled prieſts to excite nations to revolt, to dethrone kings, kindle civil wars, and lay waſte the world. If we examine the important objects, which have excited the wrath of heaven, and produced ſo many ravages upon earth, it appears, that the fooliſh reveries and whimſical conjectures of ſome theologian who did not underſtand himſelf, or the pretenſions of the clergy have broken every bond of ſociety, and bathed mankind in their blood and tears.

173. The ſovereigns of this world, by aſſociating the Divinity in the government of their dominions, by proclaiming themſelves his vicegerents and repreſentatives upon earth, by acknowledging they hold their power of him, neceſſarily admitted his miniſters, as rivals or maſters. Is it then aſtoniſhing, that prieſts have often made kings feel the ſuperiority of the celeſtial Monarch? Have they not more than once convinced temporal princes, that the greateſt power is compelled to yield to the ſpiritual power of opinion? Nothing is more difficult than to ſerve two maſters, eſpecially when they are not agreed upon what they require of their ſubjects.

The aſſociation of religion with politics neceſſarily introduced a double legiſlation into ſtates. The law of God, interpreted by his prieſts, was often repugnant to the law of the ſovereign, or the intereſt of the ſtate. When princes have firmneſs and are confident of the love of their ſubjects, the law of God is ſometimes forced to

favor

favor the wiſe intentions of the temporal ſovereign ; but generally, the *ſovereign* authority is obliged to yield to the *divine* authority, that is, to the intereſt of the clergy. Nothing is more dangerous to a prince, than to *encroach upon the authority of the Church*, that is, to attempt to reform abuſes conſecrated by religion. God is never more angry, than when we touch the divine rights, privileges, poſſeſſions or immunities of his prieſts.

The metaphyſical ſpeculations or religious opinions of men influence their conduct, only when conformable to their intereſt. Nothing proves this truth more clearly, than the conduct of many princes with reſpect to the ſpiritual power, which they often reſiſt. Ought not a ſovereign, perſuaded of the importance and rights of religion, to believe himſelf in conſcience bound reſpectfully to receive the orders of its prieſts, and regard them as the orders of the Divinity himſelf? There was a time, when kings and people, more conſiſtent and convinced of the rights of ſpiritual power, became its ſlaves, yielded to it upon every occaſion, and were nothing but docile inſtruments in its hands. That happy time is no more ; by a ſtrange inconſequence, the moſt devout monarchs are ſometimes ſeen to oppoſe the enterpriſes of thoſe, whom yet they regard as the miniſters of God. A ſovereign, deeply penetrated with religion or reſpect for his God, ought to remain proſtrate at the feet of his miniſters, and regard them as his true ſovereigns. Is there upon earth a power, which has a right to put itſelf in competition with that of the Moſt High ?

174. Have princes then, who imagine themſelves intereſted in cheriſhing the prejudices of their ſubjects, ſeriouſly reflected upon the effects, which have been, and may be again produced by privileged demagogues, who have a right to ſpeak at pleaſure, and in the name of heaven to inflame the paſſions of many millions of ſubjects? What ravages would not theſe ſacred haranguers cauſe, if they ſhould conſpire, as they have ſo often done, to diſturb the tranquility of a ſtate!

To moſt nations, nothing is more burthenſome and ruinous than the worſhip of their gods. Every where, their miniſters not only conſtitute the firſt order in the ſtate, but alſo enjoy the largeſt portion of the goods of ſociety, and have a right to levy permanent taxes upon their fellow-citizens. What real advantages then do theſe organs of the Moſt High procure the people for the immenſe profits, extorted from their induſtry? In exchange for their riches and benefits, do they give any thing but myſteries, hypotheſes, ceremonies, ſubtle queſtions, and endleſs quarrels, which ſtates are again compelled to pay for with their blood?

175. Religion, which is boaſted as the firmeſt prop of morality, evidently deſtroys its true ſprings in order to ſubſtitute imaginary ones, inconceivable chimeras, which, being obviouſly contrary to reaſon, nobody firmly believes. All declare, that they firmly believe in a God, who rewards and puniſhes; all ſay, they are perſuaded of the exiſtence of a hell and a paradiſe; yet, do theſe ideas render men better, or generally counteract the moſt trifling intereſts? Every one aſſures us, that he trembles at the judgments of

God, yet follows his paſſions, when he thinks himſelf ſure of eſcaping the judgments of *men*.

The fear of inviſible powers is ſeldom ſo ſtrong, as the fear of viſible ones. Unknown or remote puniſhments ſtrike the multitude far leſs forcibly, than the ſight of a gallows, or the public execution of a man. Few courtiers fear the anger of their God ſo much as the diſpleaſure of their maſter. A penſion, a title, or a riband ſuffices to efface the remembrance of the torments of hell and the pleaſures of the celeſtial court. The careſſes of a woman daily prevail over the menaces of the Moſt High. A jeſt, a ſtroke of ridicule, a witticiſm make more impreſſion upon the man of the world, than all the grave notions of his religion.

Are we not aſſured, that *a true repentance*, is enough to appeaſe the Divinity? Yet we ſee not, that this *true repentance* is very ſincere; at leaſt, it is rare to ſee noted thieves, even at the point of death, reſtore goods, which they are conſcious of having unjuſtly acquired. Men are undoubtedly perſuaded, that they ſhall fit themſelves for eternal fire, if they cannot inſure againſt it. But, *with heaven there is reconciliation;* by giving the church a part of his fortune, almoſt every devout rogue may die very unconcerned about the manner, in which he has enriched himſelf in this world.

176. By the confeſſion of the warmeſt defenders of religion and its utility, nothing is more rare than ſincere converſions; and we might add, nothing more unprofitable to ſociety. Men are not diſguſted with the world, until the world is diſguſted with them. A woman devotes herſelf to God, only when ſhe feels the neglect of the world.

world. In devotion her vanity acts a part, which indemnifies her for the loſs of her charms. Trifling practices help to conſume her time ; cabals, intrigues, declamations, detraction and zeal furniſh her with the means of acquiring reputation and reſpect among the devout party.

If the devout have the talent of pleaſing God and his prieſts, they have ſeldom that of pleaſing or being uſeful to ſociety. To a devotee, religion is a veil, which covers and juſtifies all his paſſions, his pride, ill humor, anger, revenge, impatience and rancour. Devotion arrogates a tyrannical ſuperiority, which baniſhes gentleneſs, indulgence and gaiety ; it authorizes to cenſure others, to reprove and revile the profane for the greateſt glory of God. It is very common to be devout, and at the ſame time deſtitute of every virtue and quality neceſſary to ſocial life.

177. It is aſſerted, that the dogma of another life is of the utmoſt importance to the peace and happineſs of ſocieties ; that without it, men would be deſtitute of motives to do good. What need is there of terrors and fables to make every rational man ſenſible how he ought to conduct upon earth ? Does not every one ſee, that he has the greateſt intereſt in meriting the approbation, eſteem and benevolence of the beings, who ſurround him, and in abſtaining from every thing, by which he may incur the cenſure, contempt and reſentment of ſociety ? However ſhort an entertainment, a converſation or viſit, does not each deſire to act his part decently, and agreeably to himſelf and others ? If life is but a paſſage, let us ſtrive to make it eaſy ; which we cannot effect, if we fail in regard for thoſe, who travel with us.

Religion, occupied with its gloomy reveries, conſiders man merely as a pilgrim upon earth; and therefore ſuppoſes that, in order to travel the more ſecurely, he muſt forſake company, and deprive himſelf of the pleaſures and amuſements, which might conſole him for the tedioufneſs and fatigue of the road. A ſtoic and moroſe philoſophy ſometimes gives us advice as irrational as that of religion. But a more rational philoſophy invites us to ſpread flowers upon the way of life, to diſpel melancholy and panic terrors, to connect our intereſt with that of our fellow-travellers, and by gaiety and lawful pleaſures, to divert our attention from the pains and croſs accidents, to which we are often expoſed; it teaches us, that, to travel agreeably, we ſhould abſtain from what might be injurious to ourſelves, and carefully ſhun what might render us odious to our aſſociates.

178. It is aſked, what motives an atheiſt can have to do good? The motive to pleaſe himſelf and his fellow-creatures; to live happy and peaceable; to gain the affection and eſteem of men, whoſe exiſtence and diſpoſitions are much more ſure and known, than thoſe of a being impoſſible to be known. Can he, who fears not the gods, fear any thing? He can fear men; he can fear contempt, diſhonor, the puniſhment and vengeance of the laws; in ſhort, he can fear himſelf, and the remorſe felt by all thoſe, who are conſcious of having incurred or merited the hatred of their fellow-creatures.

Conſcience is the internal teſtimony, which we bear ourſelves, of having acted ſo as to merit the eſteem or blame of the beings, with whom we live; and it is founded upon the clear knowl-

edge,

edge, we have, of men, and of the ſentiments, which our actions muſt produce in them. The conſcience of the religious man conſiſts in imagining that he has pleaſed or diſpleaſed his God, of whom he has no idea, and whoſe obſcure and doubtful intentions are explained to him only by ſuſpected men, who, like him, are utterly unacquainted with the eſſence of the Deity, and are little agreed upon what can pleaſe or diſpleaſe him. In a word, the conſcience of the credulous is directed by men, who have themſelves an erroneous conſcience, or whoſe intereſt ſtifles knowledge.

Can an atheiſt have conſcience? What are his motives to abſtain from hidden vices and ſecret crimes, of which other men are ignorant, and which are beyond the reach of laws? He may be aſſured by conſtant experience, that there is no vice, which by the nature of things, does not puniſh itſelf. Would he preſerve his life? he will avoid every exceſs, that may impair his health; he will not wiſh to lead a languiſhing life, which would render him a burden to himſelf and others. As for ſecret crimes, he will abſtain from them for fear he ſhall be forced to bluſh at himſelf, from whom he cannot fly. If he has any reaſon, he will know the value of the eſteem, which an honeſt man ought to have for himſelf. He will ſee, that unforeſeen circumſtances may unveil the conduct, which he feels intereſted in concealing from others. The other world furniſhes no motives for doing good, to him, who finds none here below.

179. 'The ſpeculative atheiſt, ſays the deiſt, 'may be an honeſt man, but his writings will 'make political atheiſts. Princes and miniſters,

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'no longer reſtrained by the fear of God, will 'abandon themſelves, without ſcruple, to the moſt 'horrid exceſſes.' But, however great the depravity of an atheiſt upon the throne, can it be ſtronger and more deſtructive, than that of ſo many conquerors, tyrants, perſecutors, ambitious men, and perverſe courtiers, who, though not atheiſts, but often very religious and devout, have notwithſtanding made humanity groan under the weight of their crimes? Can an atheiſtical prince do more harm to the world, than a LOUIS XI, a PHILIP II, a RICHLIEU, who all united religion with crimes? Nothing is more rare, than atheiſtical princes; nothing more common, than tyrants and miniſters, who are very wicked and very religious.

180. Every man of reflection cannot but know his duties, diſcover the relations ſubſiſting between men, meditate his own nature, diſcern his wants, propenſities and deſires, and perceive what he owes to beings, who are neceſſary to his happineſs. Theſe reflections naturally lead him to a knowledge of the morality moſt eſſential to ſocial beings. Every man, who loves to enter into himſelf, to ſtudy and inveſtigate the principles of things, has not generally very dangerous paſſions; his ſtrongeſt paſſion will be to know truth, and his ambition to teach it to others. Philoſophy is proper to cultivate both the mind and heart. On the ſcore of morals and honeſty, has not he, who reflects and reaſons, evidently an advantage over him, who makes it a principle never to reaſon?

If ignorance is uſeful to prieſts and oppreſſors of mankind, it is fatal to ſociety. Man, void of knowledge, does not enjoy his reaſon; without

reaſon

reaſon and knowledge, he is a ſavage, who is every inſtant liable to be hurried into crimes. Morality, or the ſcience of duties is acquired only by the ſtudy of man and his relations. He, who does not reflect, is unacquainted with true morality, and walks with precarious ſteps in the path of virtue. The leſs men reaſon, the more wicked they are. Savages, princes, nobles, and the dregs of the people are commonly the worſt of men, becauſe they reaſon the leaſt.

The devout man never reflects, and is careful not to reaſon. He fears all inquiry, follows authority, and often, through an erroneous conſcience, makes it a ſacred duty to commit evil. The unbeliever reaſons; he conſults experience and prefers it to prejudice. If he reaſons juſtly, his conſcience is enlightened; he finds more real motives to do good, than the bigot, whoſe only motives are his chimeras, and who never liſtens to reaſon. Are not the motives of the unbeliever ſufficiently powerful to counteract his paſſions? Is he blind enough to be unmindful of his true intereſt, which ought to reſtrain him? If ſo, he will be vicious and wicked; but he will be neither worſe nor better, than the numerous believers, who, notwithſtanding religion and its ſublime precepts, follow a conduct, which religion condemns. Is then a credulous aſſaſſin leſs to be feared, than an aſſaſſin, who believes nothing? Is a very devout tyrant leſs a tyrant, than an undevout tyrant?

181. Nothing is more uncommon, than to ſee men conſiſtent. Their opinions influence their conduct only when conformable to their temperaments, paſſions and intereſt. Daily experience ſhews, that religious opinions produce much evil

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for little good; they are hurtful, becauſe they often favour the paſſions of the ambitious, of tyrants, fanatics and prieſts; they are of no effect, becauſe incapable of counterbalancing the preſent intereſts of moſt men. Religious principles are of no avail, when they counteract ardent deſires; though not unbelievers, men then conduct as if they believed nothing.

We ſhall always be liable to err, when we judge of the opinions of men by their conduct, or of their conduct by their opinions. A religious man, notwithſtanding the unſociable principles of a ſanguinary religion, by a happy inconſequence will ſometimes be humane, tolerant and moderate; the principles of his religion are then inconſiſtent with the gentleneſs of his character. Libertines, debauchees, hypocrites, adulterers and rogues often appear to have the beſt ideas upon morals. Why do they not reduce them to practice? Becauſe their temperaments, intereſt, and habits do not accord with their ſublime theories. The rigid principles of Chriſtian morality, which many people regard as divine, have but little influence upon the conduct of thoſe, who preach them to others. Do they not daily tell us, *to do what they preach, and not what they practiſe?*

The partiſans of religion often denote an infidel by the word *libertine*. Many unbelievers are undoubtedly immoral, which is owing to their temperament, and not to their opinions. But how does their conduct affect their opinions? Cannot then an immoral man be a good phyſician, architect, geometrician, logician or metaphyſician? A man of irreproachable conduct may be extremely deficient in knowledge and reaſon. In queſt of truth, it little concerns us

from

from whom it comes. Let us not judge of men by their opinions, nor of opinions by men ; let us judge of men by their conduct, and of their opinions by their conformity with the experience, reaſon and utility of mankind.

182. Every man, who reaſons, ſoon becomes an unbeliever ; for reaſon ſhews, that theology is nothing but a tiſſue of chimeras ; that religion is contrary to every principle of good ſenſe, that it tinctures all human knowledge with falſity. The ſenſible man is an unbeliever, becauſe he ſees, that, far from making men happier, religion is the chief ſource of the greateſt diſorders, and the permanent calamities, with which man is afflicted. The man, who ſeeks his own welfare and tranquility, examines and throws aſide his religion, becauſe he thinks it no leſs troubleſome than uſeleſs, to ſpend his life in trembling before phantoms, fit to impoſe only upon ſilly women, or children.

If licentiouſneſs, which reaſons but little, ſometimes leads to irreligion, the man of pure morals may have very good motives for examining his religion, and baniſhing it from his mind. Religious terrors, too weak to impoſe upon the wicked, in whom vice is deeply rooted, afflict, torment and overwhelm reſtleſs imaginations. Courageous and vigorous minds ſoon ſhake off the inſupportable yoke. But thoſe, who are weak and timorous, languiſh under it during life ; they grow old with trembling, or at leaſt, live in anxious uncertainty.

Prieſts have repreſented God as ſo malicious, auſtere, and terrible, that moſt men would cordially

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wiſh, that there was no God. It is impoſſible to be happy, while always trembling. Ye devout! you adore a terrible God! But, you hate him; you would be glad, if he did not exiſt. Can we refrain from deſiring the abſence or deſtruction of a maſter, the idea of whom deſtroys our happineſs? The black colors, in which prieſts paint the Divinity, are truly ſhocking, and force us to hate and reject him.

183. If fear has made gods, fear ſupports their empire over the minds of mortals. They are ſo early accuſtomed to ſhudder barely at the name of the Deity, that they regard him as a ſpectre, a hobgoblin, a bugbear, which torments and deprives them of courage even to wiſh relief from their fears. They apprehend, that the inviſible ſpectre will ſtrike them the moment they ceaſe to fear. Bigots are too much in fear of their God to love him ſincerely. They ſerve him like ſlaves, who, unable to eſcape his power, reſolve to flatter their maſter, and who, by dint of lying, at length perſuade themſelves, that they in ſome meaſure love him. They make a virtue of neceſſity. The love of devotees for their God, and of ſlaves for their deſpots, is only a feigned homage, which they render to force, and in which the heart has no ſhare.

184. Chriſtian divines have repreſented their God ſo terrible and ſo little worthy of love, that ſeveral of them have thought they muſt diſpenſe with loving him; a blaſphemy, ſhocking to other divines, who were leſs ingenuous. ST. THOMAS having maintained, that we are obliged to love God as ſoon as we attain to the uſe of reaſon, the Jeſuit SIRMOND anſwered him, *that is very ſoon.* The Jeſuit VASQUEZ aſſures, that *it is enough*

to love God at the point of death. HURTADO, more rigid, says, *we must love God every year.* HENRIQUEZ is contented that we love him *every five years ;* SOTUS, *every Sunday.* Upon what are these opinions grounded ? asks father SIRMOND, who adds, that SUAREZ requires us to *love God sometimes.* But when ? He leaves that to us ; he knows nothing about it himself. *Now,* says he, *who will be able to know that, of which such a learned divine is ignorant ?* Jesuit SIRMOND further observes, that *God does not command us to love him with an affectionate love, nor does he promise us salvation upon condition that we give him our hearts ; it is enough to obey and love him with an effective love by executing his orders ; this is the only love we owe him ; and he has not so much commanded us to love him, as not to hate him.* This doctrine appears heretical, impious and abominable to the Jansenists, who, by the revolting severity they attribute to their God, make him far less amiable, than the Jesuits, their adversaries. The latter, to gain adherents, paint God in colors capable of encouraging the most perverse of mortals. Thus nothing is more undecided with the Christians, than the important question, whether they can, ought, or ought not to love God. Some of their spiritual guides maintain, that it is necessary to love him with all one's heart, notwithstanding all his severity ; others, like father DANIEL, think that *an act of pure love to God is the most heroic act of Christian virtue, and almost beyond the reach of human weakness.* The Jesuit PINTEREAU goes farther ; he says, *a deliverance from the grievous yoke of loving God is a privilege of the new Covenant.*

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185. The character of a man always decides that of his God; each makes one for himſelf, and like himſelf. The man of gaiety, involved in diſſipation and pleaſure, does not imagine, that his God can be ſtern and croſs; he wants a goodnatured God, with whom he can find reconciliation. The man of a rigid, moroſe, bilious, ſour diſpoſition, muſt have a God like himſelf, a God of terror, and regards, as perverſe, thoſe, who admit a placable, indulgent God. As men are conſtituted, organized and modified in a manner, which cannot be preciſely the ſame, how can they agree about a chimera, which exiſts only in their brains?

The cruel and endleſs diſputes between the miniſters of the Lord, are not ſuch as to attract the confidence of thoſe, who impartially conſider them. How can we avoid the completeſt infidelity, upon viewing principles, about which thoſe, who teach them to others, are never agreed? How can we help doubting the exiſtence of a God, of whom the ideas are viſibly ſo different and fluctuating in the heads of his miniſters? Finally, how can we avoid totally rejecting a God, who is nothing but a ſhapeleſs lump of contradictions? How can we refer the matter to the deciſion of prieſts, who are perpetually at war, treating each other as impious and heretical, defaming and perſecuting each other without mercy, for differing in the manner of underſtanding the truths, they announce to the world?

186. The exiſtence of a God is the baſis of all religion. Nevertheleſs, this important truth has not as yet been demonſtrated, I do not ſay ſo as to convince unbelievers, but in a manner ſatisfactory to theologians themſelves. Profound

thinkers have at all times been occupied in inventing new proofs of a truth, moſt intereſting to mankind. What are the fruits of their meditations and arguments? They have left the ſubject in the ſame condition; they have demonſtrated nothing; they have almoſt always excited the clamors of their brethren, who have accuſed them of having poorly defended the beſt of cauſes.

187. The apologiſts of religion daily repeat, that the paſſions alone make unbelievers. 'Pride, 'ſay they, and the deſire of ſignalizing them-'ſelves, make men atheiſts. They endeavor like-'wiſe to efface from their minds the idea of God, 'becauſe they have reaſon to fear his terrible 'judgments.' Whatever may be the motives, which incline men to irreligion, it is our buſineſs to examine, whether their ſentiments are founded in truth. No man acts without motives. Let us firſt examine the arguments; we ſhall afterwards examine the motives, and ſee whether they are not legitimate and more rational than thoſe of ſo many credulous bigots, who ſuffer themſelves to be guided by maſters little worthy of the confidence of men.

You ſay then, Prieſts of the Lord! that the paſſions make unbelievers; that they renounce religion only through intereſt, or becauſe it contradicts their inordinate propenſities; you aſſert, that they attack your gods only becauſe they fear their ſeverity. But, are you yourſelves, in defending religion and its chimeras, truly exempt from paſſions and intereſts? Who reap advantages from this religion, for which prieſts diſplay ſo much zeal? Prieſts. To whom does religion procure power, influence, riches and honors? To

Prieſts.

Prieſts. Who wage war, in every country, againſt reaſon, ſcience, truth and philoſophy, and render them odious to ſovereigns and people? Prieſts. Who profit by the ignorance and vain prejudices of men? Prieſts.—Prieſts! you are rewarded, honored and paid for deceiving mortals, and puniſh thoſe, who undeceive them. The follies of men procure you beneſices, offerings and expiations; thoſe, who announce the moſt uſeful truths, are rewarded only with chains, gibets and funeral-piles. Let the univerſe judge between us.

188. Pride and vanity have been, and ever will be vices inherent in the prieſthood. Is any thing more capable of rendering men haughty and vain, than the pretence of exerciſing a power emanated from heaven, of having a ſacred character, of being meſſengers and miniſters of the Moſt High? Are not theſe diſpoſitions nouriſhed by the credulity of the people, the deference and reſpect of ſovereigns, the immunities, privileges and diſtinctions enjoyed by the clergy? In every country, the vulgar are much more devoted to their ſpiritual guides, whom they regard as divine, than to their temporal ſuperiors, whom they conſider as no more than ordinary men. The parſon of a village acts a much more conſpicuous part, than the lord or judge. Among the Chriſtians, a prieſt thinks himſelf far above a king or an emperor. A Spaniſh grandee having ſpoken rather haughtily to a monk, the latter arrogantly ſaid; *Learn to reſpect a man, who daily has your God in his hands and your Queen at his feet.* Have prieſts then a right to accuſe unbelievers of pride? Are they themſelves remarkable for uncommon modeſty or profound humility?

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Is it not evident, that the desire of domineering over men is essential to their trade? If the ministers of the Lord were truly modest, should we see them so greedy of respect, impatient of contradiction, positive, and unmercifully revengeful to those, whose opinions offend them? Does not modest science feel how difficult is the discovery of truth? What other passion but unbridled pride can make men so savage, revengeful, and void of indulgence and gentleness? What can be more presumptuous, than to arm nations and deluge the world in blood to establish or defend futile conjectures?

You say, that presumption alone makes atheists. Inform them then what your God is; teach them his essence; speak of him intelligibly; say things, which are reasonble, and not contradictory or impossible. If you are unable to satisfy them, if hitherto none of you have been able to demonstrate the existence of a God in a clear and convincing manner; if by your own confession, his essence is completely veiled from you, as from the rest of mortals, forgive those, who cannot admit what they can neither understand nor reconcile; do not tax, with presumption and vanity, those, who are sincere enough to confess their ignorance; do not accuse of folly those, who cannot believe contradictions; and for once, blush at exciting the hatred and fury of *sovereigns* and people against men, who think not like you concerning a being, of whom you have no idea. Is any thing more rash and extravagant, than to reason concerning an object, known to be inconceivable?

You say, the corruption of the heart produces atheism, that men shake off the yoke of the Di-

vinity,

vinity, only becauſe they fear his formidable judgments. But, why do you paint your God in colors ſo ſhocking, that he becomes inſupportable? Why does this ſo powerful God permit that hearts be ſo corrupt? How can we help endeavoring to ſhake off the yoke of a tyrant, who, able to do as he pleaſes with the hearts of men, conſents to their perverſion, hardens, blinds, and refuſes them his grace, that he may have the ſatisfaction to puniſh them eternally for having been hardened, blinded, and for not having the grace, which he refuſed? Theologians and prieſts muſt be very confident of the grace of heaven and a happy futurity, to refrain from deteſting a maſter ſo capricious as the God, they announce. A God, who damns eternally, is the moſt odious of beings, that the human mind can invent.

189. No man upon earth is truly intereſted in the ſupport of error; it is ſooner or later forced to yield to truth. General good muſt at length open the eyes of mortals; the paſſions themſelves ſometimes contribute to break the chains of prejudice. In ſome countries of EUROPE, have not the paſſions of ſovereigns within two centuries annihilated the tyrannical power, which a too haughty pontiff once exerciſed over all princes of his ſect? A more enlightened policy has ſtripped the clergy of the immenſe riches, which credulity had accumulated upon them. Ought not this memorable example to convince prieſts, that prejudices are but for a time, and that truth alone can inſure ſolid happineſs?

By careſſing ſovereigns, forging them divine rights, deifying them, and abandoning the people, bound hand and foot, to their will, did not

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the miniſters of the Moſt High ſee, that they were labouring to make them tyrants? Have they not reaſon to apprehend, that the gigantic idols, which they raiſe to the clouds, will one day cruſh them by their enormous weight? Have they not, by a thouſand examples, reaſon to fear, that theſe unchained lions, after devouring nations, will devour them, in their turn?

We will reſpect prieſts, when they become citizens. Let them, if they pleaſe, uſe the authority of heaven to frighten thoſe princes; who are continually deſolating the earth; let them no more adjudge to them the horrid right of being unjuſt with impunity; let them acknowledge, that no man is intereſted in living under tyranny; let them teach ſovereigns, that they themſelves are not intereſted in exerciſing a deſpotiſm, which, rendering them odious, expoſes them to danger, and detracts from their power and greatneſs. Finally, let enlightened prieſts and kings acknowledge, that no power is ſecure, which is not founded upon truth, reaſon and equity.

190. The miniſters of the gods, by waging a bloody war againſt human reaſon, which they ought to unfold, evidently act againſt their own intereſt. What power, influence and reſpect might they not have gained among the wiſeſt of men; what gratitude would they not have excited in the people, if, inſtead of their vain diſputes, they had applied to ſciences truly uſeful; to the inveſtigation of the true principles of philoſophy, government and morals! Who would dare reproach a body with its opulence or influence, who, dedicating their leiſure and authority to the public good, ſhould employ one in ſtudying,

and

and the other in enlightening the minds of ſovereigns and ſubjects?

Prieſts! Forſake your chimeras, unintelligible dogmas, and contemptible quarrels; transfer to imaginary regions, thoſe phantoms, which could be uſeful to you only in the infancy of nations. Aſſume, at length, the language, of reaſon. Inſtead of ſounding the alarm of perſecution againſt your adverſaries, of entertaining the people with ſilly diſputes, of preaching uſeleſs and fanatic virtues, preach human and ſocial morality; preach virtues really uſeful to the world; become the apoſtles of reaſon, the lights of nations, the defenders of liberty, the reformers of abuſes, the friends of virtue; and we will bleſs, honor and love you; every thing will inſure you a permanent empire over the hearts of your fellow-citizens.

191. Philoſophers have every where interpoſed to inſtruct nations in the ſcience of duties, a part, which ſeems deſtined to the miniſters of religion. The hatred of the latter for philoſophy was only a jealouſy of trade. Ought not all men of reflection, inſtead of endeavoring to injure and decry each other, to unite their efforts to combat error, ſeek truth, and eſpecially to put to flight the prejudices, that are equally injurious to ſovereigns and ſubjects, and of which the abettors themſelves ſooner or later become the victims?

In the hands of an enlightened government, prieſts will become the moſt uſeful citizens. Already richly paid by the ſtate and free from the care of providing for their own ſubſiſtence, could they be better employed than in qualifying themſelves for the inſtruction of others? Would not their minds be better ſatisfied with diſcovering

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luminous truths, than fruitleſsly wandering in thick darkneſs ? Would it be more difficult to diſcern the clear principles of a morality made for man, than the imaginary principles of a divine and theological morality ? Would men of ordinary capacities find it as difficult to fix in their heads the ſimple notions of their duties, as to load their memories with myſteries, unintelligible words and obſcure definitions, of which they have never the leaſt conception ? What time and pains are loſt in learning and teaching men things, which are not of the leaſt real utility !

What reſources for the encouragement of the ſciences, the advancement of knowledge and the education of youth, might not welldiſpoſed ſovereigns find in ſo many monaſteries, which in ſeveral countries devour without profiting nations ! But ſuperſtition, jealous of its excluſive empire, ſeems reſolved to form only uſeleſs beings. To what advantage might we not turn a multitude of cenobites of both ſexes, who, in many countries, are amply endowed for doing nothing ? Inſtead of engroſſing their thoughts by barren contemplations, mechanical prayers, trifling practices ; inſtead of overwhelming them with faſting and auſterities, why ſhould we not excite in them a ſalutary emulation, which may incline them to ſeek means of uſefully ſerving the world, from which they are buried by fatal vows ? Inſtead of filling the youthful minds of their pupils with fables, ſterile dogmas and puerilities, why are not prieſts obliged or invited to teach them truths and render them uſeful to their country ? Under the preſent ſyſtem, men are uſeful only to the clergy, who blind them, and to tyrants, who fleece them.

192. The partiſans of credulity often accuſe infidels of hypocriſy, becauſe they ſometimes waver in their principles, alter their minds in ſickneſs and repent at death. When the body is diſordered, the faculty of reaſoning is commonly diſordered with it. Man, weak and decayed, at the approach of death, is ſometimes ſenſible himſelf, that his reaſon abandons him; he feels the return of prejudice. There are ſome diſeaſes, which tend to create deſpondency, puſillanimity, and to weaken the brain; there are others, which deſtroy the body, but do not diſturb reaſon. However it may be, an infidel, who recants in ſickneſs, is not more extraordinary, than a devotee, who neglects in health the duties, that his religion explicitly enjoins.

CLEOMENES, king of Sparta, having ſhown but little reſpect for the gods during his reign, became ſuperſtitious, as he drew near his end. With the view of intereſting heaven to prolong his days, he calls around him a crowd of prieſts and ſacrificers. One of his friends expreſſing his ſurpriſe, *at what are you aſtoniſhed*, ſays CLEOMENES, *I am no longer what I was; and being no longer the ſame, I cannot think in the ſame manner.*

The miniſters of religion often contradict in their daily conduct the rigorous principles, they teach to others; in conſequence of which, infidels think that they, in their turn, may juſtly accuſe them of hypocriſy. If ſome infidels retain not at death, or in ſickneſs, the ſentiments, they ſupported in health, do not prieſts belie while in health, the rigid principles of the religion, they teach? Do we ſee many prelates, who are humble, generous, void of ambition, enemies of pomp and grandeur, and friends of poverty?

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In fine, does the conduct of many Chriſtian miniſters conform to the auſtere morality of Chriſt, their God, and their model?

193. Atheiſm, it is ſaid, breaks all the ties of ſociety. Without the belief of a God, what will become of the ſacredneſs of oaths? How ſhall we bind an atheiſt, who cannot ſerioufly call the Divinity to witneſs? But does an oath ſtrengthen our obligation to fulfil the engagements contracted? Will he, who is not fearful of lying, be leſs fearful of perjury? He, who is baſe enough to break his word, or unjuſt enough to violate his engagements, in contempt of the eſteem of men, will not be more faithful therein for having called all the Gods to witneſs his oaths. Thoſe, who difregard the judgments of men, will ſoon difregard the judgments of God. Are not princes, of all men, the moſt ready to ſwear, and the moſt ready to violate the oaths, they have taken?

194. *The vulgar*, it is repeatedly ſaid, *muſt have a religion. If enlightened perſons have no need of the reſtraint of opinion, it is at leaſt neceſſary to rude men, whoſe reaſon is uncultivated by education.* Is it indeed a fact, that religion is a reſtraint upon the vulgar? Do we ſee, that this religion preſerves them from intemperance, drunkenneſs, brutality, violence, fraud, and every kind of exceſs? Could a people, who have no idea of the Divinity, conduct in a more deteſtable manner, than theſe *believing* people, among whom we find diſſipation and vices the moſt unworthy of reaſonable beings? Upon going out of their temples, do not men ruſh, undaunted, into their ordinary irregularities, and imagine that the periodical homage, which they render

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their God, authorizes them to follow, without remorſe, their vicious and habitual propenſities? Finally, if people are ſo rude and unreaſonable, is not their ſtupidity chargeable to the negligence of princes, who are wholly regardleſs of public education, and even oppoſe the inſtruction of their ſubjects? Is not the want of reaſon in the people evidently the work of prieſts, who, inſtead of inſtructing men in a rational morality, entertain them with fables, reveries, practices, chimeras and falſe virtues, which they think of the laſt importance?

To the people, religion is but a vain pomp of ceremonies, to which they are attached by habit, which entertains their eyes, and produces a tranſient emotion in their torpid underſtandings, without influencing their conduct or reforming their morals. Even by the confeſſion of the miniſters of the altars, nothing is more rare than that *internal* and *ſpiritual* religion, which alone is capable of regulating the life of man and triumphing over his propenſities. Among the moſt numerous and devout people, are there really many, who are capable of underſtanding the principles of their religious ſyſtem, and who find them powerful enough to ſtifle their perverſe inclinations?

Many perſons will ſay, that any reſtraint whatever is better than none. They will maintain, that if religion awes not the greater part, it ſerves to reſtrain, at leaſt, ſome individuals, who would otherwiſe abandon themſelves to crimes without remorſe. Men ought undoubtedly to have a reſtraint, but not an imaginary one; they muſt have true fears, which are much more proper to reſtrain men, than panic terrors and chimeras.

Religion frightens only ſome puſillanimous ſouls, whoſe imbecility of character already renders them little formidable to their fellow-citizens. An equitable government, ſevere laws and ſound morality equally impoſe upon all; at leaſt, every perſon would be forced to believe in them, and would perceive the danger of not conforming to them.

195. Perhaps it will be aſked, whether rational atheiſm can be proper for the multitude? I anſwer, that any ſyſtem, which requires diſcuſſion, is not made for the multitude. What purpoſe then can it ſerve to preach atheiſm? It may at leaſt ſerve to convince thoſe, who reaſon, that nothing is more extravagant than to fret themſelves, and nothing more unjuſt than to vex others for groundleſs conjectures. As for the vulgar, who never reaſon, the arguments of an atheiſt are no more fit for them, than the ſyſtems of a philoſopher, the obſervations of an aſtronomer, the experiments of a chymiſt, the calculations of a geometrician, the reſearches of a phyſician, the draughts of an architect, or the pleadings of a lawyer, who all labor for the people without their knowledge.

But, are the metaphyſical reaſonings and religious diſputes, which have ſo long engroſſed the time and attention of ſo many profound thinkers, better adapted to the generality of men, than the reaſoning of an atheiſt? Nay, as the principles of atheiſm are founded upon reaſon, are they not more intelligible, than thoſe of a theology, which is beſet with difficulties, not to be ſolved by the greateſt geniuſes? In every country, the people have a religion, of which they are totally ignorant, which they never examine

amine and follow by rote ; their prieſts alone are engaged in theology, which is too ſublime for vulgar heads. If the people ſhould loſe this unknown theology, they might eaſily conſole themſelves for the loſs of a thing, which is not only perfectly uſeleſs, but alſo produces dangerous fermentations.

It would be madneſs to write for the vulgar, or attempt a ſudden cure of their prejudices. We write for thoſe only, who read and reaſon ; the multitude read but little, and reaſon ſtill leſs. Calm and rational perſons will be enlightened ; light will be gradually diffuſed, and in time ſtrike the eyes even of the people.

196. If theology is a branch of commerce profitable to theologians, it is evidently not only ſuperfluous, but injurious to the reſt of ſociety. Intereſt will ſooner or later open the eyes of men. Sovereigns and people will one day acknowledge the indifference and profound contempt, with which we ought to treat a futile ſcience, which ſerves only to confound, without rendering men better. They will be ſenſible of the inutility of ſo many expenſive cuſtoms, which contribute nothing to public felicity ; they will bluſh at ſo many contemptible quarrels, which will ceaſe to diſturb the tranquillity of ſtates, when they ceaſe to annex to them a ridiculous importance.

Princes ! inſtead of meddling with the ſenſeleſs combats of your prieſts ; inſtead of fooliſhly eſpouſing their impertinent quarrels, and attempting to ſubject your ſubjects to uniform opinions, ſtrive to make them happy in this world, and trouble not yourſelves about the fate, which awaits them in another. Govern them equitably, give them good laws, reſpect their lib-

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erty and property, watch over their education, encourage them in their labors, reward their talents and virtues, repreſs licentiouſneſs, and do not concern yourſelves with their manner of thinking upon objects, uſeleſs to them as well as yourſelves. You will then have no need of fictions to ſecure obedience; you will become the ſole guides of your ſubjects; who will be uniform in their ſentiments of love and reſpect. Theological fables are uſeful only to tyrants, who are ignorant of the art of reigning over rational beings.

197. Does it then require an extraordinary effort of genius to comprehend, that what is above the capacity of man, is not made for him; that things ſupernatural are not made for natural beings; that impenetrable myſteries are not made for limited minds? If theologians are fooliſh enough to diſpute upon objects, which they acknowledge unintelligible, muſt ſociety be concerned in their ſilly quarrels? Muſt the blood of nations flow to enhance the conjectures of a few infatuated dotards? If it is difficult to cure theologians of their madneſs, and the people of their prejudices, it is at leaſt eaſy to prevent the pernicious effects of both. Let every one have liberty to think as he pleaſes; but never let him injure another for his manner of thinking. Were the rulers of nations more juſt and rational, theological opinions would not affect the public tranquility, more than the diſputes of philoſophers, phyſicians, grammarians and critics. Theological quarrels would not be attended with ſerious conſequences to ſtates, were it not for the tyranny of princes. When kings ceaſe to interfere in theology,

theology, the diſputes of theologians will no longer be terrible.

Thoſe, who extol the importance and utility of religion, ought to ſhew us its happy effects, and the advantages, which the diſputes and abſtract ſpeculations of theology can be to porters, artiſans, huſbandmen, declaimers, women and the multitude of corrupted ſervants, with which great cities abound. All theſe beings are religious; they have what is called *an implicit faith*; their parſons believe for them; they ſtupidly adhere to the unknown belief of their guides, diligently hear ſermons, and regularly aſſiſt at ceremonies; they would think it a great crime to tranſgreſs any of the ordinances, to which, in childhood, they are taught to conform. Of what ſervice to morals is all this? None at all. They have not the leaſt idea of morality, and are even guilty of all the roguery, fraud, rapine and exceſs, that is out of the reach of law.

The populace have no idea of their religion; what they call religion is nothing but a blind attachment to unknown opinions and myſterious practices. In fact, to deprive the people of religion is to deprive them of nothing. By ſhaking or curing their prejudices, we ſhould only leſſen or annihilate the dangerous confidence, they put in intereſted guides, and teach them to miſtruſt thoſe, who, under color of religion, often lead them to fatal exceſſes.

198. Under pretence of inſtructing and enlightening men, religion in reality keeps them in ignorance, and ſtifles the deſire of knowing the moſt intereſting objects. The people have no other rule of conduct, than what their prieſts are pleaſed to preſcribe. Religion ſupplies the

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place of every thing elſe ; but, dark itſelf, it is more proper to lead mortals aſtray, than to guide them in the path of ſcience and happineſs ; philoſophy, morality, legiſlation and politics are to them enigmas. It is impoſſible for man, blinded by his religious prejudices, to know his own nature, cultivate his reaſon, and make experiments ; he fears truth, when it claſhes with his opinions. Every thing concurs to render the people devout ; but every thing tends to prevent them from being humane, reaſonable and virtuous. Religion ſeems to have no other object, than to contract the heart, and ſtupify the mind of man.

Prieſts have been ever at war with genius, merely becauſe the wiſe perceive, that ſuperſtition ſhackles the human mind, and would keep it in eternal infancy, occupied ſolely by fables, and frightened by phantoms. Incapable of improvement itſelf, theology has oppoſed inſurmountable barriers to the progreſs of true knowledge ; its ſole object is to keep nations and their rulers in the moſt profound ignorance of their duties, and the real motives, that ſhould incline them to do good. It obſcures morality, renders its principles arbitrary and ſubjects it to the caprice of gods or their miniſters. It converts the art of governing men into a myſterious tyranny, which becomes the ſcourge of nations. It changes princes into unjuſt, licentious deſpots, and the people into ignorant ſlaves, who become corrupt in order to merit the favor of their maſters.

199. By tracing the hiſtory of the human mind, we ſhall eaſily be convinced, that theology has cautiouſly guarded againſt its progreſs.

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It began by feeding the mind with fables, which were uttered as ſacred truths. It produced poetry, which filled the imagination of men with its puerile fictions; it entertained them with its gods and their incredible deeds. In a word, religion has always treated men, like children, whom it ſoothed with tales, which its miniſters would have us ſtill regard as inconteſtable truths.

If the miniſters of the gods have ſometimes made uſeful diſcoveries, they have always been careful to give them a dogmatical tone, and envelop them in the ſhades of myſtery. The Pythagoraſes and Platoes, to acquire a trifling knowledge, were obliged to creep at the feet of prieſts, be initiated in their myſteries, and undergo whatever trials, they were pleaſed to impoſe. At this price, they were permitted to imbibe ſome exalted notions, ſtill ſo bewitching to all thoſe, who admire only what is perfectly unintelligible. It was from Egyptian, Indian and Chaldean princes, from the ſchools of theſe dotards, profeſſionally intereſted in bewildering human reaſon, that philoſophy was obliged to borrow its firſt rudiments. Obſcure and falſe in its principles, mixed with fictions and fables, and fit only to dazzle the imagination, the progreſs of this philoſophy was precarious and its theories unintelligible; inſtead of enlightening it blinded the mind and diverted it from objects truly uſeful.

The theological ſpeculations and myſtical reveries of the ancients are ſtill law in a great part of the philoſophic world; being adopted by modern theology, it is hereſy to baniſh them. They tell us of *aerial beings*, of *ſpirits*, *angels*, *demons*, *genii* and other phantoms, which are the

object of the meditations of our moſt profound thinkers, and ſerve as the baſis of *metaphyſics*, an abſtract and futile ſcience, which for thouſands of years the greateſt geniuſes have vainly ſtudied. Thus hypotheſes, imagined by a few dotards of Memphis and Babylon, are the foundation of a ſcience, whoſe obſcurity makes it revered as marvellous and divine.

The firſt legiſlators were prieſts; the firſt mythologiſts, poets, learned men and phyſicians were prieſts. In their hands ſcience became ſacred; they withheld it from the profane; they ſpoke only by allegories, emblems, enigmas, and ambiguous oracles—means well calculated to excite curioſity, employ the imagination, and eſpecially to inſpire the aſtoniſhed vulgar with a holy reſpect for men, who were thought to be inſtructed by the gods, capable of reading in heaven the fate of the earth, and who boldly proclaimed themſelves the organs of the divinity.

200. The religions of theſe ancient prieſts have diſappeared, or rather changed form. Although our modern theologians regard them as impoſtors, yet they have collected many ſcattered fragments of their religious ſyſtems, the whole of which is not extant. In our modern religions, we find not only their metaphyſical dogmas, which theology has only clothed in a new dreſs, but alſo remarkable remains of their ſuperſtitious practices, their theurgy, magic and enchantments. Chriſtians are ſtill commanded reſpectfully to meditate the remaining monuments of the legiſlators, prieſts and *prophets* of the Hebrew religion, which, in all probability, had borrowed its whimſical notions from Egypt. Thus extravagances, imagined by knaves or idol-

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atrous dotards are ſtill ſacred opinions among Chriſtians!

If we examine hiſtory, we ſhall find a ſtriking reſemblance among all religions. In all parts of the earth, we ſee, that religious notions periodically depreſs and elevate the people. The attention of man is every where engroſſed by rites, practices often abominable, and formidable myſteries, which become the ſole objects of his meditations. The different ſuperſtitions borrow from one another, their abſtract reveries and ceremonies. Religions in general are only unintelligible rhapſodies combined by new teachers, who uſe the materials of their predeceſſors, reſerving the right of adding or retrenching whatever is not conformable to their preſent views. The religion of EGYPT was evidently the baſis of the religion of MOSES, who baniſhed the worſhip of idols; MOSES was merely a ſchiſmatic Egyptian. Chriſtianity is only reformed judaiſm. Mahometaniſm is compoſed of judaiſm, chriſtianity and the ancient religion of ARABIA, &c.

201. Theology, from the remoteſt antiquity to the preſent time, has had the excluſive privilege of directing philoſophy. What aſſiſtance is derived from its divine labors? It has changed philoſophy into an unintelligible jargon, calculated to render uncertain the cleareſt truths; it has converted the art of reaſoning into a ſcience of words, and carried the human mind into the airy regions of metaphyſics, and there employed it in founding uſeleſs and dangerous abyſſes. Inſtead of phyſical and ſimple cauſes, this philoſophy has ſubſtituted ſupernatural, or rather, truly *occult* cauſes; it has explained difficult phenomena by agents ſtill more inconceivable. It has

filled language with words void of ſenſe, incapable of accounting for things, better calculated to obſcure than enlighten, and which ſeems invented expreſsly to diſcourage man, to guard him againſt the powers of his mind, make him miſtruſt the principles of reaſon and evidence, and encompaſs truth with an inſurmountable rampart.

202. Were we to believe the partiſans of religion, nothing could be explained without it; nature would be always an enigma, and man incapable of underſtanding himſelf. But, what does this religion in reality explain? The more we examine it, the more we are convinced, that its theological notions are fit only to confuſe our ideas; they change every thing into myſtery; they explain difficult things by thoſe, that are impoſſible. Is it a ſatisfactory explanation of things, to attribute them to unknown agents, to inviſible powers, or immaterial cauſes? Does the human mind receive much light by being referred to *the depths of the treaſures of divine wiſdom*, to which, we are repeatedly told, it is vain to extend our raſh inquiries? Can the divine nature, of which we have no conception, help to conceive the nature of man, which it is found ſo difficult to explain?

Aſk a Chriſtian philoſopher, what is the origin of the world? He will anſwer, that God created it. What is God? He cannot tell. What is it to create? He knows not. What is the cauſe of peſtilence, famine, wars, droughts, inundations and earthquakes? The anger of God. What remedies muſt be applied to theſe calamities? Prayers, ſacrifices, proceſſions, offerings and ceremonies are, it is ſaid, the true means of diſarming celeſtial fury. But why is heaven enraged?

raged? Becauſe men are wicked. Why are men wicked? Becauſe their nature is corrupt. What is the cauſe of this corruption? It is, ſays the theologian, becauſe the firſt man, beguiled by the firſt woman, ate an apple, which his God had forbidden him to touch. Who beguiled this woman into ſuch folly? The devil. Who made the devil? God. But, why did God make this devil, deſtined to pervert mankind? This is unknown; it is a myſtery concealed in the boſom of the Divinity.

It is now univerſally acknowledged, that the earth turns round the ſun. Two centuries ago, a devout philoſopher would have called this opinion blaſphemy, becauſe irreconcilable with the ſacred books, which every Chriſtian reveres, as inſpired by the Deity himſelf. Notwithſtanding divine revelation, Chriſtian philoſophers at length depend rather upon evidence, than upon the teſtimony of their inſpired books.

What is the hidden principle of the motions of the human body? The ſoul. What is a ſoul? A ſpirit. What is a ſpirit? A ſubſtance, which has neither form, color, extenſion nor parts. How can we form any idea of ſuch a ſubſtance? How can it move a body? They know not; it is a myſtery. Have beaſts ſouls? The Carteſian aſſures us, they are machines. But, do they not act, feel and think in a manner very ſimilar to man? Mere illuſion! By what right do you deprive beaſts of a ſoul, which, though utterly ignorant of it, you attribute to man? Becauſe the ſouls of beaſts would embarraſs our theologians, who, ſatisfied with the power of terrifying and damning the immaterial ſouls of men, are not ſo much intereſted in damning thoſe of beaſts.

Such are the puerile ſolutions, which philoſophy, always in the leading-ſtrings of theology, has been obliged to give, in order to explain the problems of the phyſical and moral world!

203. How many evaſions and forced conſtructions have not ancient and modern thinkers uſed to avoid an engagement with the miniſters of the gods, who have ever been the true tyrants of thought! How many hypotheſes and ſhifts have the DESCARTES, the MALLEBRANCHES, the LEIBNITZ, and many others been forced to invent, in order to reconcile their diſcoveries with the reveries and miſtakes, which religion had conſecrated! With what precautions have not the greateſt philoſophers enveloped themſelves, even at the riſk of being abſurd, inconſequent or unintelligible, whenever their ideas did not accord with the principles of theology? Vigilant prieſts have been always attentive to extinguiſh ſyſtems, which oppoſed their intereſt. Theology was ever the bed of PROCUSTUS, upon which this robber extended ſtrangers; he cut off their limbs when they were too long, or ſtretched them by horſes, when too ſhort for the bed, upon which his ſavage cruelty placed them.

Can any ſenſible man, delighted with the ſciences and attached to the welfare of his fellow-creatures, reflect without vexation and anguiſh upon the loſs of ſo many profound, laborious and ſubtle heads, which for ages have been fooliſhly exhauſted in ſtudying chimeras, always uſeleſs, and often hurtful to our ſpecies? What a treaſure of knowledge might not have been diffuſed by ſo many celebrated thinkers, if, inſtead of engaging in the impertinent diſputes of a vain theology, they had devoted their attention to objects,

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that are intelligible and truly important to mankind? Half the efforts, which religious opinions have coſt genius, and half the wealth, which frivolous forms of worſhip have coſt nations, would have ſufficed to inſtruct them perfectly in morality, politics, philoſophy, phyſic, agriculture, &c. Superſtition generally abſorbs the attention, admiration and treaſures of the people; their religion coſts them very dearly; but they have neither knowledge, virtue nor happineſs for their money.

204. Some ancient and modern philoſophers have been bold enough to aſſume experience and reaſon for their guides, and to ſhake off the chains of ſuperſtition. LEUCIPPUS, DEMOCRITUS, STRATO, and ſome other Greeks have preſumed to tear off the thick veil of prejudice, and deliver philoſophy from theological ſhackles. But their ſyſtems, too ſimple, ſenſible and free from the marvellous, for imaginations enamoured with chimeras, were obliged to yield to the fabulous conjectures of the PLATOES, SOCRATES and ZENOES. Among the moderns, HOBBES, SPINOSA, BAYLE, &c. have followed the ſteps of EPICURUS; but their doctrine found very few followers in a world, ſtill too much intoxicated with fables to liſten to reaſon.

In every age, it has been dangerous to depart from prejudices, conſecrated by opinion. Diſcoveries of every kind were prohibited; all, that the moſt enlightened men could do, was to ſpeak ambiguouſly, and often, through a baſe complaiſance, ſhamefully mix falſehood with truth. Several had a *double doctrine*, one public and the other hidden; the key of the latter being loſt,

their

their true ſentiments often become unintelligible, and conſequently uſeleſs.

How could modern philoſophers, who, under pain of the moſt cruel perſecution, were commanded to renounce reaſon, to ſubject it to faith, that is, to the authority of prieſts ; how, I ſay, could men, thus bound, have given free ſcope to their genius, improved reaſon, and accelerated the progreſs of the human mind ? It was with trembling that the greateſt men had a glimpſe of truth ; rarely had they courage to announce it ; thoſe, who had, were commonly puniſhed for their temerity. Thanks to religion, it was not lawful to think loud, or combat the prejudices, of which man is every where the victim and dupe.

205. Every man, ſufficiently intrepid to announce truth to the world, is ſure of incurring the hatred of the miniſters of religion.* The latter loudly call to their aid the powers of the earth ; they want the aſſiſtance of kings to ſupport both their arguments and their gods. Their clamors but too much expoſe the weakneſs of their cauſe.

To call for help is always a ſignal of diſtreſs.

In matters of religion, man is not permitted to err. Upon any other ſubject, he may be miſtaken with impunity ; he pities thoſe, who go aſtray, and ſhews ſome kindneſs to perſons, who diſcover new truths ; but when religion is thought intereſted in errors or diſcoveries, a holy

zeal

* The reader ſhould remember, that this book was originally written in EUROPE. We candidly acknowledge, that what the AUTHOR ſays of the clergy in general, is not at preſent, in *every* point, *ſtrictly* applicable to the clergy of this country.

Yes; as far as they dare.

zeal is kindled, ſovereigns exterminate, people become frantic, nations are in uproar without knowing why.

Is any thing more afflicting, than that public and private felicity ſhould depend upon a futile ſcience, deſtitute of principles, whoſe only baſis is a diſtempered imagination, which preſents the mind nothing but words void of ſenſe ? In what conſiſts the ſo much boaſted utility of a religion, which nobody can comprehend, which continually torments thoſe, who are weak enough to meddle with it, which is incapable of rendering men better, and which often makes a merit of being unjuſt and wicked ? Is there a folly more deplorable, and which can be more juſtly combatted, than that, which, far from doing any ſervice to the human race, only blinds them, makes them delirious, and renders them miſerable by depriving them of truth, which alone can ſoften the rigor of their fate ?

206. Religion has ever filled the mind of man with darkneſs, and kept him in ignorance of his true relations, duties and intereſts. It is only by diſpelling the clouds and phantoms, that we ſhall diſcover the ſources of truth, reaſon and morality, and the real motives that ſhould incline us to virtue. Religion diverts us from the cauſes of our evils, and from the remedies, which nature preſcribes ; far from curing, it only aggravates, multiplies and renders them more durable. Let us obſerve then with a celebrated modern, that *theology is the box of Pandora ; and if it is impoſſible to ſhut it, it is at leaſt uſeful to inform men, that this fatal box is open.* (1)

DISTRICT

(1) Lord BOLINGBROKE's poſthumous works.

F I N I S.

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DISTRICT *of* MASSACHUSETTS, *to wit.*

{L. S.} BE it remembered, that on the fifth day of June, in the nineteenth year of the Independence of the United States of America, ISAIAH THOMAS, the third, of the ſaid Diſtrict, hath depoſited in this Office, the Title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as Proprietor, in the words following, to wit: "Common Senſe: or, Natural Ideas oppoſed to Supernatural."

In conformity to the Act of the Congreſs of the United States, intitled, "An Act for the encouragement of learning, by ſecuring the copies of Maps, Charts and Books to the Authors and Proprietors of ſuch copies, during the times therein mentioned."

N. GOODALE,

Clerk of the Diſtrict of Maſſachuſetts.

A true copy of Record—Atteſt

N. GOODALE.

ERRATA.

In a few Copies, will be found the following Errata.

In the bottom line of the firſt page of the preface, inſtead of (.) read (;) Page 16, line 10 from the top, for *remble* read *tremble*. P. 36, l. 18, for *glory*, read *excellence*. P. 51, l. 6, for *occording*, read *according*. P. 56, l. 13, for *ane*, read *and*. P. 58, l. 35, after *adminiſtration*, read *of*. P. 87, laſt line, for *be*, read *by*. P. 122, l. 2, for *two* read *too*. P. 137, l. 12, for *mtke*, read *make*. P. 141, l. 30, after *part*, read *of*. P. 163, l. 10, for *wiſely*, read *viſibly*. P. 179, l. 10, for *placaple*, read *placable*. P. 187, l. 23, after *are*, read *you*.

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